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A NOBLE QUEEN:

A ROMANCE OF INDIAN HISTORY.

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BY

MEADOWS TAYLOR,
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B. 2394

'O, never was there queen
So mightily betray'd!'

Antony and Cleopatra, act i. sc. iii.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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A NOBLE QUEEN.

BOOK II.—*continued.*

CHAPTER VII.

FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

At the loud cries of the Mirdhas and silver-stick bearers of "Burkhast, Durbar Burkhast!" "The durbar is dissolved!" the various masses of troops filed out of the square before the Hall of Audience in the same gorgeous array as they had entered. Indeed, the effect was even more gorgeous, for before the assembly the sun had been slightly veiled with thin clouds, and had only occasionally shone out with full brightness; but now the clouds had cleared away, and the sun's rays descended on the glittering masses with a power which materially enhanced their splendour. One by one the nobles left the hall, making their humble obeisances to the Throne, and, joined by their retinues, passed onwards through the citadel to the gate, and thence to their respective abodes

within and without the citadel. The prospect of immediate service in the field, too, enhanced the spirit of the many different bodies of men, and their party or national war cries arose from time to time, mingled with shouts of "Victory to Abbas Khan!" which, entirely spontaneous as they were, filled his heart with joy. The Queen again reminding him that he was to return at the usual hour of council, attended by the Portuguese priest, left the hall before it was emptied; and when most of the nobles had gone on, he mounted his horse, and rode home at a quiet pace.

In truth, his wound was painful, for his shield was somewhat heavy; and the rapidity and strength of the blows showered on him by the Abyssinian had required his utmost skill and vigilance to parry. He had no doubt, therefore, that the Padré's bandages had been strained, as, indeed, they proved to have been on examination. In the heat of the encounter, all pain had been forgotten; and it was now great and increasing, and he longed for relief. But his mind was full of joyous gratitude, not only for preservation in the ordeal, but for the establishment of his innocence of cowardice or of treachery; and the papers found on the Abyssinian might even prove more, since it was evident, from the addresses on them, that they had belonged to Elias Khan, and before the night had passed all would be clear.

Thus Abbas Khan rode on through the streets of the fort which led to his uncle's house, slowly and deliberately,

receiving the salutations of the crowds which filled them with grateful acknowledgments. As the troops broke up from the durbar, great numbers of them had betaken themselves to these streets; and the real joy with which they now greeted the young nobleman, always a favourite, was more real and more genuine, perhaps, than that evinced before the ordeal. Abbas Khan was the popular hero of the day: women stretched out their arms from the housetops and blessed him, and wished him a hundred years of life and joy; stalwart veterans would not be kept off; and some kissed his feet, others put portions of his garment to their lips, and with a blessing turned away. It was almost too much to bear.

At his gate he was met by the whole household, and the usual ceremonies of welcome were performed ere he crossed the threshold. Lighted lamps were waved over him, incense was burnt in the name of the protecting saints, and vows of offerings at their shrines promised by the venerable Moolla, who was present on behalf of his aunt. As he dismounted from his horse, he caressed it fondly. As if he had understood his warning, Sooltan had been steady and perfectly manageable through the combat, and nothing but his perfect temper, and the ease and certainty with which he had followed every turn of his master's wrist or pressure of his knee or heel, could have ensured victory. As he ascended the steps of the hall of audience all that were present rose and

greeted him; many came forward to embrace him, and several poets of the city presented addresses in verse, of a very florid and laudatory description, comparing him to Roostum and the champions described in the "Shah Nama" with painstaking fidelity, which, whatever the merits of the composition might be, were sufficiently tedious. When these were finished, and suitable rewards ordered, Abbas Khan, fairly wearied out, excused himself to the rest of the company, and went at once to his aunt, who had already sent several messages to him to come as quickly as he could; and truly it was grateful to him to find himself once more encircled by the arms of one so revered by him and so dear.

"Oh! thou art safe, thou art safe, my son!" she cried, as she clung sobbing to his neck. "I feared for thee; I wept for thee; I prayed for thee to the Lord and His saints, and I was heard; and as soon as the news was brought to me that thou hadst won the combat, I sent Fatehas to all the mosques and shrines; and to-morrow, Inshalla! I will feed a thousand poor people in the name of the Imams. And thou art not hurt, my son?"

"Not hurt, mother; but the old wound needs looking to by the Padré Sahib: it is sore and stiff. It is he alone that can give me rest and ease. He is waiting within, and I must go to him; for there are other matters on which he must be consulted. I will come to thee at the evening prayers, after which,

when I have eaten, I must return to the Queen for the evening council."

"So soon," she said, "so soon to leave me; and I had hoped to sit and talk with thee a whole evening! Well, thou must do thy duty to our Royal mistress; and why should I regret that thou doest it? God forbid. And she was gracious unto thee, Meeah?".

"Mother, she wept; she could hardly speak as I went up to her; but I saw that she believed in me, and she was happy. Happy, mother; and your son was proud, too, when she rose and declared I was to lead the division that goes to the King's aid. Ah! that was too much honour; may I be worthy of it!"

"I have no fear, Meeah," replied the old lady. "Go where she sends thee, and win honour and fame as thine uncle has done; but go now and get relief."

Abbas Khan found the priest in his own apartment, who, after very sincere congratulations, helped him to divest himself of the mail shirt he wore, when he fell to an examination of the wound.

"No doubt, my lord, it is sore and smarting from the weight and strain of the armour; but it is sound, and there hath been no more bleeding. I will change all these dressings now, and put on lighter ones, and in a few days there will be no more danger of relapse."

The new, cool dressings were a delicious relief, and left his arm at full liberty for action of any kind. Until he reached the King's

camp, he should have no occasion to use it in any but the most ordinary actions.

"And now, Padré Sahib," continued Abbas Khan, when the operation was finished, "make yourself ready to come with me to the Palace to-night. The Queen-Regent desires to see you on a matter of much importance, and I am ordered to bring you with me."

"Do you know why?" asked D'Almeida. "Nothing in regard to the mission at Moodgul could have given offence to Her Majesty? I wish we had had longer notice; Maria might have made some sweetmeats, for an offering, or some of her work. Yet I remember, she hath an exquisite lace veil, and it could not be presented to one more worthy."

"The matter is this," replied Abbas Khan. "On the body of the Abyssinian was found a case of letters. Some of them are in Persian and Mahrathi, others in your language; at least the writing is in the Frangi character. No one that she can trust can read it, and assuredly no one among the Portuguese artisans and gunners could translate the papers. Do you remember anything which might give a clue to these letters?"

"I do," he replied. "Was your adversary a very tall, very powerful man, with hard, black features?"

"He was, Padré; why do you ask?"

"Because, some months ago, soon after Dom Diego came,

a man such as I describe, mounted on a big chesnut horse, and with several attendants, arrived at Moodgul. They came to me first, but the letter they brought was addressed to my colleague, and I directed them to him. The man was so remarkable that, as he rode away, I called Maria to look at him. There was a renegade Portuguese with that man, who spoke to me in our language, and interpreted what I said to him."

"Ah! that is valuable, my friend; but you do not know of what passed between him and Dom Diego?"

"Nothing whatever, my lord. Once only the good Nawab, my friend, hinted that some intrigue was in progress between my superior and Eyn-ool-Moolk, but warned me against having any concern in it. But what could Dom Diego do, even if he has engaged in intrigue?"

"Ah! my friend, you are too simple," returned the young Khan, laughing; "he could get money; he could promise your nation's troops."

"Those he will never get," interrupted the priest. "Our Government has declined from the first to mix itself up in the affairs of kingdoms whom our nation esteems to be heretical. I have heard there have been many offers by the Emperor Akbar, and others before him, but the policy of our Government is consistent and friendly to all."

"And yet you are a nation of valiant soldiers. It is strange to see such without ambition."

"Which might lead to our ruin, my lord. No; wise minds have determined and guided our course hitherto, and we only defend ourselves when we are attacked."

"As we know to our cost, Señor Padré; and as they of Ahmednugger found to theirs in the siege of Ghoul," returned Abbas Khan, laughing. "But enough now; be ready when I send for you. And your sister is well, and hath all she needs?"

"All, my lord, and is grateful. She is busy preparing for her school; and our poor folks are thankful for even the few ministrations we have afforded them."

"Only be careful, Señor, lest you excite bigotry among mine. Alas! there is bitterness between Moslim and Nazarene; but you have only to be careful."

"Yet at Moodgul no one molests us, my lord."

"There are many who would do so if they dared, my friend; but you are under protection there by order of the State, and here it may be different. I only say be cautious, and you are as safe here as there."

The priest bowed and retired. What his young friend had said to him he did not tell to his sister; but some of the castles they had been building had already been shaken, and caution was at least necessary, lest they should crumble down altogether.

As the Padré left him, Abbas Khan threw a light sheet over himself, and slept profoundly. The Lady Fatima stole in several

times to see him, and at last seated herself near him ; and, with a light fan, drove away the flies which would have settled on his face. How proud she was of her boy. "The Lady Queen is as proud," she said to herself, "I know ; but she could not do this like me. Am I not the happier ? for I can watch him while every mood of his mind leaves its expression on his features. See, now, there is a frown, and the fingers seem to clutch something ; it is his sword, and he dreams of the combat. And there ! now all is changed, and there is love on the moist lips and in the smiles. Why dreams he of her ? Ah, well ! may she be worthy."

So the young man slept, and so his good aunt tended him as she had done when he was a child And the time flew rapidly, and the muezzin from the minaret of the garden mosque began to chant invitation to the evening prayer, "Allah-hu-Akbar ! Allah-hu-Akbar !" and then Abbas Khan woke, and found his aunt sitting beside him, watching.

"My sleep was sweet," he said, "because thou watchedst over me, mother. Ah, so sweet ! may God reward thee. But I must go to the prayer now."

"There are many who wish to speak with thee, my son," she said ; "and one is very urgent, Runga Naik, a Beydur."

"Bid him wait ; he is, indeed, most needful. I will not be long away, mother, or I will send for him."

Entering the garden by the private door, Abbas Khan per-

formed his ablutions at the little fountain, whose cool, sparkling water refreshed him. The garden was refreshing also; and, as he knelt down, a soft feeling of grateful adoration stole over him. Many of his friends were assembled there, and their salutations, with the warm grasp of the hand which accompanied them, were more grateful to him than he had ever remembered before.

"I will attend ye speedily, friends," he said to them, "but I have some private affairs to see to first here, and ye must excuse me;" and, calling to an attendant, he bade him bring in Runga Naik, and seating himself on the rim of the fountain, awaited his coming alone. Presently he saw the Beydur chief enter, peering about as though he were in a thick forest, but, directly he saw his young master, he bounded forward with a cry of joy, and threw himself at his feet.

"I was not in time, Meeah," he said, as soon as his emotion had subsided, "to see thee slay that villain. Would I had been! But I could not travel faster with the prisoners; and it was only at the last stage that I heard thou hadst reached this the day before, when the Lady Queen was hunting. What had delayed thee?"

"Only the wound again, friend," said the Khan, laughing. "One day—it was our second march—my horse, it was one of Osman Beg's, stumbled and fell with me, the stitches of my wound burst open, and the Padré Sahib insisted I should not travel till I

was well. Notwithstanding his skill, I could not move for more than a month; but I had good lodging at Talikota."

"So near to my town; and why did you not send for me, Meeah?"

"I did send; but thou wert gone, they said, to Belgaum, and thou hadst not returned when I resumed my journey."

"Then you have heard nothing, my lord, of the old Dervish and his child? Are they with thee?"

"No!" replied Abbas Khan, starting at the question. "Not with me. I have never even heard of them. By your soul, tell me what you know."

"I had been absent from home, tracing our men who had deserted us at Kórla, and had three hundred of my best men with me. You were then in Juldroog, and I heard afterwards you and the Moodgul Padré had departed. There was one of our Beydur festivals to come on after that, and I returned home for it, when I was suddenly sent for by the Dervish, and I delivered Zóra from the palace of Osman Beg, where she was confined under the charge of two procuresses from Moodgul. Yes, Burma Naik and Bheema and I did it; and to this day I regret that I did not slay thy profligate cousin as he slept."

"But, but!" cried Abbas Khan, horrible thoughts rising in his mind, "she was safe, she had not been dishonoured?"

"Thanks be to the Gods, she was safe, Meeah. There had

been an attempt at a marriage that afternoon; but the stout old Moolla refused to perform it, and the ceremony was deferred till the morrow. I saw there was time for me to do what was needed, and we three brought her away, through the panthers' cave. Who dared to follow us?"

"And then?" cried the Khan, breathlessly and anxiously.

"Only this," continued the simple fellow; "I had a boat ready, and the old man's property was placed in it as evening fell; and when we three brought the girl away safely, we crossed the river, and I took them to Kukeyra, where I have a house, and where I bestowed them safely, with six hundred of my people there to guard them."

"And they are there now, Runga?"

"No," he replied, "they are not there; and that is what troubles me. One of the Kukeyra men met me here to-day, and told me that the old man had grown restless; and though Zóra had entreated him to remain, yet he had left Kukeyra and gone to our Rajah at Wakin Keyra, who was protecting him; and that Osman Beg had sent spies across to trace them, and even attempted to follow with his retainers: but who can cross the river mother if the Beydurs say nay?"

"Now may God be praised, Runga, for this protection of them! Oh, think, if that child had come to harm! And it was a foul plot and outrage of Osman Beg's, for which he shall answer to me as

surely as the sun shines or as the Abyssinian died. But art thou sure it was a forcible abduction of the child?"

"There is no doubt of that. Jooma and another carried Zóra from the bastion, as she sat looking at Cháya Bhugwuti; and only that the good old Moolla refused, Zóra would have been married by Nika, and would have now been in thy cousin's zenana. Yes, that is true, Meeah; I heard it from Zóra, and others have told me since."

"He shall answer this before the King and his mother," said Abbas Khan, fiercely. "Ever treacherous! who can trust him?"

"He has other things to answer for besides this, Meeah," was the reply. "Look! here are more papers, more letters;" and he took a packet from his waistband; "and I have secured all Elias Khan's Duftur, and his scribe. There are plenty of Osman Beg's letters in it—and other people's too, for the matter of that—quite enough to give him a seat under the Goruk Imlee trees, and to find the executioner making him a last salaam."

"Then he should be summoned at once, Runga."

"If you were not to go to your uncle and the King he might be; but as it is, he had better remain. He thinks he is quite safe; and, indeed, he is safe, for it is impossible for him to stir; but here he would intrigue while you are away. He might even learn news of the old Dervish, and carry off Zóra in spite of us; but now I will send word to my people, and to the twelve

thousand, that her honour is your honour and mine ; and they know what that means. I, Meeah, go to the war with thee, for the men here who belong to the Rajah are mad to go with us, and I will not deny them."

"Oh, true friend and brother!" exclaimed the young Khan, with a choking sensation in his throat, and tears welling up in his eyes ; "what can I render to thee for all this aid, and thy good counsel? Yes, come with me, Runga ; we have fought before together, but none know thee but me. Now all shall know thee, and thou shalt be honoured and rewarded. First, let us do our duty to the King, and then," he continued, rising, "I call the holy saints to witness, our duty will be done to others. Hast thou eaten food, Runga?"

"No," he said, "not since yesterday ; but I have bathed, and am hungry. Tell them to give me something from thy kitchen, Meeah ; and suffer me to eat here, where I can offend no one, and put my dinner on fresh plantain leaves. Ah ! that will be a luxury, indeed ! "

The servants brought to him portions of the savoury food which was ready in the kitchen, and deposited it on a huge plantain leaf which he had gathered. They saw him eat as it seemed to them voraciously, but in truth little food had passed his lips for two days ; and when he had finished, they saw him wrap himself in the sheet which had before served him as upper covering and waist-band, and lying down on the bare earth fall into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NIGHT COUNCIL.

As on the previous evening, Abbas Khan arrived at the entrance to the council chamber at the usual hour, accompanied by Francis d'Almeida. They had come in palanquins, for convenience sake; and, on this occasion, Abbas Khan had dispensed with his inner mail coat and soldier-like costume, and wore the ordinary Court dress of his rank—simple white muslin, with a Cashmere shawl; and carried only a light Court sword in his hand. He felt that there was no danger now. The priest wore his best cassock and the gown of his order; and, rejecting the advice of Maria, went in his bare feet, and sandals which he could easily put off. His dress formed a strange contrast with the flowing robes of his companion; and the heavy slouched hat made it even more remarkable in comparison with the turbans of the Palace attendants. Yet his frank, handsome face, bright fresh colour, silky moustachios and beard, which, as a missionary, he had allowed to grow, denoted at once elevated birth and extreme intelligence. Abbas Khan had given him some general instruction as to his demeanour in approaching the throne, and the worthy priest appeared by no means flurried

or anxious as to the result. As he knelt down on one knee, doffed his hat gracefully, and bowed his head as he would have done to his own King, the Royal lady was satisfied that the priest had seen Courts, and was well born and bred; and her surprise was not a little enhanced by the excellent Persian in which he replied to her inquiries after the health of his sister and himself.

"And you speak Canarese also, I hear?" she said; "and thy sister too?"

"It is the tongue of our people at Moodgul and of our Church there, which the beneficence of your Royal ancestor, Ibrahim, established," he replied; "and it is more familiar to our lips than Persian, which we have seldom need to use. In Canarese, my sister is as good a scholar as I am, and we are now translating the New Testament, or Unjeel."

"May I be your sacrifice," cried the chief priest, who was in his accustomed place; "but the Nazarenes have no correct version of the Unjeel. Did not the Prophet (may his memory be blessed) denounce them? In chapter——"

"Nay, reverend sir," interposed the Queen, "we are not met for a religious discussion, but for State affairs; and I pray you to be silent. Here, in the court of the refuge of the poor, my son, all men are equal in His and my sight, whatever may be their faith. We leave that to God, before whom we are all equal. Be

seated, sir," continued the Queen; "we have pressing business to do ere we can enter upon what thou canst aid us in."

It seemed as if there were no place vacant, except one close to the chief priest, who evidently did not relish the idea of being touched by an unbeliever; and he fidgeted in his seat, crowded as much as possible into his neighbour's, held up his scarf to his mouth, and in every way expressed his objection to any proximity to the Padré, who in his turn was much embarrassed. But the Brahmin Minister of Finance, whose heart had warmed towards the Padré in hearing his own language spoken so fluently and so well, offered him his own seat, and took that assigned to Francis d'Almeida. Thus peace was for the present secure, but when it might be broken by the chief priest's intolerance it was impossible to declare.

It was a busy scene. Orders for the pay of the troops about to march had to be signed by the Queen and by the heads of departments present, to be paid from the treasury next morning; orders also to district authorities on the road to provide supplies and forage at each stage, and to have the roads made practicable for the artillery. Public carriage cattle out at graze had been recalled; but more were necessary, and Hyat Khan's requisitions were heavy on the city. These, with the usual revenue and district papers to be signed and made up, correspondence to be written, and drafts of letters to be read, occupied a long time, and was

watched by the Padré with the utmost interest; while his neighbour the Brahmin kept up with him a lively conversation in Canarese. He had heard of the Padré's learning from other Brahmins, who came periodically for their dues to the Royal city; and his manner was kind and considerate. At last, as his business was concluded, and his assistant was tying up his bundle of papers, he whispered to the Padré—

"I must depart, sir. Sit quietly where you are, and do not stir, unless the Queen-Mother calls you or sends for you. Above all, beware of the chief priest; for he would make no scruple of quarrelling with you, even before the Queen. He barely tolerates our presence, being, as he calls us, Kaffirs, and is certainly less tolerant of you, a Nazarene. It would not be wise to cross him."

"Yet if he should revile my Church?"

"I say still, answer him not," returned the other, "nor speak at all, except the Queen herself bid thee. He is most intolerant, perhaps dangerous."

"I thank you sincerely for your warning, and I will be very discreet, you may be sure," was Francis d'Almeida's reply; but he was not the less determined to bear testimony in the cause of his faith, should it be needful. Was he not a missionary of Christ, and a soldier of the Church militant? So he sat quietly, much amused and interested in the scene passing before him, in the

multiplicity of business, and the ease and regularity with which it was conducted. Abbas Khan was busy with the details of the force he was to command, giving instructions to the various leaders of companies and divisions, and was for the present absorbed in his work, now and then exchanging a word with the Queen-Mother, and explaining to her what was being done. Here also he learned more of the political state of the country than he had ever known before, or was likely to learn elsewhere. Boorhan Nizam Shah, King of Ahmednugger, who had supported the conspiracy of Eyn-ool-Moolk, had been defeated by King Ibrahim of Beejapoor and Humeed Khan. Subsequently his own son Ismail had rebelled, but was defeated by his father, who, after the battle of Hoomayoonpoor, being seriously ill, returned to Ahmednugger as his successor, and died soon afterwards, having nominated as his successor his son Ibrahim, a fractious and violent youth of sixteen. The Beejapoor army, after repulsing the attack by King Boorhan, had taken up positions at Sholapoor and Juldroog, otherwise called Shahdroog, during the rainy season, and the King was with these troops; but the express received by the Queen Dowager contained the important news that King Ibrahim of Ahmednugger was making immense preparations for an immediate invasion of the Beejapoor territory; and though this might possibly be averted by negotiations, yet, considering the violence of the young King of Ahmednugger's character, such a result as was desired

did not seem probable by any means, and troops must be hurried on without delay. The Padré saw that Abbas Khan had been the best selection possible for the purpose, on account of his present popularity, ability, and activity; but the prospect of being left with his sister alone in the great city was anything but agreeable. He had, however, acquired such entire confidence in his young friend, that he was sure he would not be left to the issues of chance, nor unprotected.

At last the long sitting was concluded, and the Queen, rising, excused herself for a while, and went into an inner chamber for refreshment, while the courtiers chatted freely among themselves; and D'Almeida now allowed his eyes to wander over the sides and fretted ceiling of the beautiful room, to admire its rich Gothic architecture and the elegance of its proportions and decorations; but there was an absence of light to show all to advantage, and he thought he might perhaps, through Abbas Khan, be allowed to see it by day. How he wondered, too, at the immense blocks of buildings which formed the palace, for all was new to him; and except the Palace of the Seven Storeys, and the roofs of some of the edifices which he could see from the roof of the mansion where he and his sister resided, he knew nothing, all else being hidden by the high walls and towers of the citadel.

When the Queen re-entered and took her seat, all present rising to receive her, Hyat Khan, the Kotwal, produced a list of those

persons who had been tracked and apprehended by Runga Naik Beydur, who, he said, was without, and could give a clear account of them. He was, certainly, only a Beydur, but might be allowed to stand before the daïs.

"God forbid! God forbid!" cried the chief priest, putting his hands to his ears, who was evidently brimming over with suppressed fury. "I have been sitting in this durbar for two reigns of illustrious and pious Kings, and I never heard of a Beydur being admitted to the presence. Pah! thooh! an uncircumcised dog—not even a Hindoo—who lives on pig, and whose breath would taint the air of a whole city. God forbid! God forbid!"

"And yet he is a good and faithful soldier of the State, and an honest, God-fearing man," said Abbas Khan, stoutly. "I, for one, do not feel as if I should be polluted by his presence. What say ye, noble friends?" and he looked around. "As for our Queen-Mother, ye have already heard her sentiments; and do we dare to dispute them? One thing is certain, we shall know nothing of these prisoners unless he explains why they were apprehended."

"True!" said the chief Kazee; "and to hear evidence is necessary to attain justice. I care not for pig——"

If there had been any chance of a skirmish between the two learned authorities, as some hoped who had witnessed such

scenes, they were disappointed; for the Kotwal, at a sign from the Queen, ordered Runga to be admitted, and as he entered was shown where to make his obeisance. And he finally stood after his own fashion on one leg, pressing the sole of the other foot against the calf, and with his hands joined in supplication.

"You can speak to him, Abbas Khan," said the head Kazee. "Ask him to tell the Queen who these men are?"

"I represent," humbly returned the Khan, "that I am his commander, and am interested, beside, in what may transpire. Can the interpretation of the Padré Sahib be accepted? else some Brahmin might be sent for."

"The Padré's evidence I could not take," returned the Kazee, "it is not admissible by law; but his interpretation we can accept, my Queen and my lords, if he swear on the Unjeel. Hast thou the book, O Padré?"

"It is here, my lord," returned D'Almeida, taking a small copy from his pocket, and removing the clean white handkerchief in which it was wrapped.

"Place the holy book on thy head, or as thou wilt, and declare that thou wilt interpret truly," was the Kazee's reply.

"Holy book, indeed!" indignantly snorted the chief priest. "Holy book! sacred to Satan! Well, times are changed; a Nazarene priest and a pig-eating Beydur before the Queen, in the Royal palace. What next, I wonder!"

Francis d'Almeida was burning to reply, but he remembered the words of his Brahmin friend, and was silent. "I am ready now," he said, simply, "and I will speak truly."

"Let there be entire silence," cried one of the Court ushers by order of the Queen, and Runga Naik began his history. We know most of it already; but the latter portion, relating his rescue of Zóra, his tracking of the rebel members of Elias Khan's band, the escape of the Abyssinian after a close pursuit, gave a new interest to the narrative. Runga himself, though dazed at first by the beauty of the room and the presence of the Queen, of whom he had heard so much, was now assured; and the story was told with a simple modesty and confidence which, to every hearer present, conveyed an assurance of truth and reality. Elias Khan had endeavoured to tempt him into disloyalty; he had promised him money and an estate if he would cut off all the Royal outposts on the north bank of the Krishna. "But I did not do that, mother," he cried to the Queen in his homely speech, and stretching forth his hands; "my people have been faithful to Beejapoor since it was a kingdom, and was I to turn traitor for villains like Eyn-ool-Moolk and Elias? Meeah, there, and I were old friends, and he was my superior. I went to him as fast as I could, and three hundred of my people were to follow on foot, but they were too late; for the day after I reached him was that of the fight in which he slew Elias, and was well nigh slain himself. I have heard it

whispered he was a coward, but who dare say that now? I could not bear it, and hunted down most of the men who deserted him, but some have escaped. Let the Kotwal Sahib tell what they have said to him."

"I humbly represent to the throne," said the Kotwal, "that one and all have confessed to having been seduced by messengers from Elias Khan, and humbly beg their lives. They have shed no blood."

"Abbas Khan," said the Queen, in reply, "if it please thee, I give their lives into thy hands; do with them as it is good unto thee; unless, indeed, the Kazee demands them for trial."

"They have committed no murder, noble lady, that they should come before me," returned the Kazee. "If they have offended, it is against the State, and the State has power over all traitors."

"Then I accept them as our Queen-Mother's gift," said the young Khan, rising and making three obeisances at the foot of the throne; "Hyat Khan will help me to arrange about them. I have no fear of them, and they have been with me in many a fair fight. But we delay, lady; wilt thou not order the papers to be examined which were found this morning?"

"They are here, my lords," said the Queen, "and first we should hear those in the Frangi character, and the Padré Sahib can translate them for us. Approach, sir," she continued to Francis d'Almeida, "sit at the foot of the throne."

"Touba! Touba!" muttered the Peer Sahib, as the chief priest was usually designated. "For shame! for shame! an infidel sitting on a step of the throne! Inshalla!——"

"I advise your reverence to be silent," whispered the Kotwal; "it is necessary he should do so, and any interruption will not be allowed by the Queen. You know what she can do if she pleases; and I say let her alone."

The Peer Sahib made no reply; but it was clearly visible to all, that what had been said to him had increased his previous ill-humour.

By this time the leather case had been opened by one of the Queen's secretaries, and the contents counted. The letters with the superscription in Portuguese were then separated from the rest, which were placed at the Queen's feet. "You will be pleased to read them and translate them afterwards to Her Majesty. If possible in Persian; if not, in Canarese, which she understands."

"I will translate them into Persian," was the priest's reply, "for that is known to all;" and he took up one of the letters and began to read it. It was of no consequence, however, being from the authorities of Goa to Elias Khan in reference to several points in regard to transit duties, of which the secretary made a memorandum on the back. After several others of trivial import, came one with an elaborate refusal of the Government of Goa to assist the

designs of Eyn-ool-Moolk and Elias Khan on behalf of Prince Ismail, which it gave the Padré much satisfaction to expound. He had heard of the refusal of his Government to countenance the rebellion, but here was ample confirmation under the signature of the Governor, Don Mathias de Albuqurque, and his councillors; and threats of denouncing the conspirators to the King of Beejapoor in case the correspondence was renewed.

Prince Ismail's party, then, appear to have begun an intrigue with Dom Diego, superior of the Moodgul Mission, imploring his advocacy with the Viceroy, and offering not only increased powers to the Mission, but large perquisites to himself; and these terms being recapitulated from the original Persian letter, Dom Diego's own requests followed, which the Padré read with astonishment, mingled with terror; for he had demanded not only the large province of Dharwar as his own perquisite, but four lakhs of hoons to maintain it and the European troops he should need. He undertook to obtain presently two thousand Europeans from Goa, and two thousand more from Portugal as soon as possible, and with this force and those of the Prince he undertook to deliver Beejapoor, with all its treasures, into the possession of Eyn-ool-Moolk and the Prince. It was a cunningly devised scheme, and inside the letter was found a copy of the Persian reply from Elias Khan on behalf of his master, Eyn-ool-Moolk, agreeing to the whole, and urging Dom Diego not to delay, and sending him a thousand hoons as

earnest money by the hands of Yakoob Khan, Abyssinian. Again the correspondence was continued up to the time when the rebels were attacked by Humeed Khan, and the death of Eyn-ool-Moolk; and when the translator had finished, there was a general murmur of approbation and congratulation to the Queen Dowager on the danger which the State had escaped, and of thanks for the important services rendered by so able an explanation of the letters; and the Queen herself was profuse in her acknowledgments, given with the charming yet dignified manner of which she was so admirable a mistress.

Little used to such profuse compliments from so exalted a person, the simple Padré was at first overwhelmed with emotion; but he gradually took courage, and, rising to his feet, excused himself for ignorance of Court customs in not having at first presented the only offering he and his sister had to make, of which he now begged the Queen's acceptance; and, drawing the small packet of lace from his breast, unfolded the veil and laid it at her feet. It was at once evident that she was much gratified as well as surprised at the delicacy and elegance of the beautiful fabric, and examined the pattern with curious interest. Nor could she quite credit the Padré's assertion that it was his sister Maria's own work with her needle only. Having examined it, she passed it round to those present, but the Peer Sahib would not touch it, and folded his hands in his robe, as though he might be contaminated.

"We can offer little in return for this priceless work," said the Queen, when she received the veil; "nevertheless, if you will accept this"—and she took from a cushion near her a costly Cashmere shawl—"on behalf of your sister, we shall be gratified." And as she spoke she handed it to one of the Court ushers, who, with the usual dexterous flourish, threw it over the shoulders of the Padré, where it formed a curious contrast with his plain black robe. But he could not refuse the gift without offence, and again making an obesiance to the Queen, allowed it to remain.

Meanwhile the secretaries had been separating the Persian correspondence, and arranging it by names and dates, and the Queen now desired it to be read. All that related to those who no longer existed were put aside, but that of Osman Beg contained painful revelations. He had offered to give up his fort to the rebel troops; he had furnished them with information in regard to movements of troops from Beejapoor to the westward, and had advised Elias Khan to attack his cousin's party, which guarded the main fords of the river, and cut it off before the floods came, and when the road to the capital would be opened. But we need not, perhaps, follow a detail which may have been anticipated, while there was little doubt that the letters he had received from the leader of the rebel faction were, possibly, still in his possession. What should be done then? As was usual with her, the Queen left this point to the determination of the Council, re-

serving her opinion for the present, and an animated discussion followed. The treachery of his cousin in regard to the State, in advising his destruction to Elias Khan, the treacherous abduction of Zóra, had sunk deep into Abbas Khan's heart, and declining to be a party in the discussion, he took his seat near the Padré, who, by this time, had taken his original place; but he separated the Padré from the irate Peer Sahib, which was, perhaps, fortunate.

The question most important to be decided was, what to do with Osman Beg? Was he to be recalled at once, or sent to some distant fortress, or to Moodgul, for detention? or was he to be brought to the capital, and imprisoned till the King's pleasure was known? There was no question that he should be arrested without delay, and his successor, Meer Kasim Ali, an officer who could be entirely depended upon, was at once named by several in the council as the fittest person, and Hyat Khan, the Kotwal, vouched for his leaving the city before dawn. He knew Juldroog perfectly, and was acquainted with the garrison. There was no doubt of his surprising Osman Beg, and placing him under detention, pending further orders; and he was at once sent for, and arrived as the reading of the correspondence was concluded, and was ushered into the presence—a fine soldier-like young man, somewhat older than Abbas Khan, but with equally bold and frank features. He was immediately made acquainted with the duty

assigned to him, and a grateful smile passed over his features as he felt that his success would involve promotion to the grade held by Osman Beg, and he received the Royal commission, putting it to his forehead and eyes, and making a profound reverence.

"And now," said the Queen, "we give our opinion and instructions at once. We would not have Osman Beg, whose father is honoured among us, and honoured by the King, imprisoned in a fortress, or sent to Dilawer Ali Khan, at Moodgul, where intrigue may take place. We would have him kept in Juldroog, under watchful care, till the King's return, when, in full durbar, he may plead what he can in extenuation. You will, also, Meer Sahib, inquire, and report to me, as soon as possible, under what circumstances the venerable Syud, long known as the Dervish, and his granddaughter left Juldroog, and where they are at present. Should their place of residence be known, you are to despatch them to the presence without delay."

"And," added the Kazee, "with the Royal permission, we ask you to ascertain from the Kazee and Moollas of the fort whether any ceremony of marriage, Nika or otherwise, passed between Osman Beg and Zóra-bee, the granddaughter of the Syud Dervish, and who performed it."

"The Royal orders are on my head and eyes," returned the young man, "and I am honoured by them. Nothing shall be left undone."

"And your escort?" asked the Queen.

"I have twenty good soldiers of my own, lady," he replied; "and when one not in favour is to be displaced, a hint is sufficient."

"I would also ask you," continued the Queen, "to ascertain whether one Dom Diego, the head priest at Moodgul, is still there."

"I think I can answer that question, noble Queen," said the Padré, joining his hands. "When Abbas Khan was ill from his wound, at the village near Talikota, I heard that Dom Diego had left Moodgul for Goa, being succeeded by two humble priests who had taken charge of the mission; and this was confirmed by some of my flock who came to the fair at Talikota, who told me they were satisfied with the new comers until I could return to them."

"And you are a physician, too, sir," cried the Queen, "as well as a master of languages. Oh, that thou wouldst see the real Queen, Taj-ool-Nissa, who languishes sorely, and can obtain no relief, though we have sent even to Beeder for learned men. Will you see her, Padré Sahib? it is not late even now, and she is still awake."

"Before I entered the Church," replied the Padré, "I studied both medicine and surgery in my own country and in Spain, from the Moorish physicians, who are most wise. There I learned somewhat of Arabic also, which, perhaps, led me to the East; and though I joined the Church as a humble servant of God, I was

not without hope, like many of its missionaries, I might use my medical skill in its service. Yea, noble Queen, I am ready to use any humble skill I possess in behalf of the Royal Queen, your daughter."

"There is no time like the present," returned the Queen; "our bles will excuse me while I conduct you to her. Rise, sir, and follow me."

The Peer Sahib could contain himself no longer—

"Astagh-fur-oolla! God forbid! Touba! Touba! Shame! Shame! that I, a humble priest of Alla and his Prophet, whose name be honoured, should see this. Touba! Touba! that an infidel should have honour in the palace of Beejapoor. He a servant of God! He, an eater of pig and bibber of wine! He, an agent of Satan, a disseminator of the abominable doctrines which Mahomed Moostafa, Prophet of God, hath cursed! He who worships images, who——"

It was in vain that Abbas Khan, the Kazee, and others present, strove to stop this tirade, which, as the priest raised his voice, rose into a shriek.

"Be silent!" he cried; "hear the words of the Prophet," and he made a long quotation from the Koran, which we may spare our readers. "I forbid this! I denounce the lying Feringi! I doom him to hell! I——"

The Queen stood erect on the pile of cushions which had

formed her throne, her slight figure appearing to dilate with excitement and indignation as she stretched forth her arm and pointed her finger at the insolent divine—

"Peace!" she cried, "Peer Sahib. This is the first time in my long life that the piety or the hospitality of this great house was called in question. Peace! know thy place before the throne, and be silent."

But the Peer heeded not. "It is sorcery! It is sorcery!" he cried. "Was not she, that woman, accused of sorcery in the time of Kishwar Khan? Did he not denounce her when he sent her a prisoner to Sattara?"

"This is too much insolence for your Majesty to hear. Pass in, we pray thee, and leave us to silence him," said the venerable and blind Ekhlas Khan, who sat nearest to the throne.

"Nay," returned the Queen, "I never fled from man yet, noble Khan, and I await the Peer's homage and apology;" and she reseated herself with dignity.

"If I allowed a harsh word to escape me in the heat of argument," said the Peer, rising and crossing his arms on his breast, "I humbly beg pardon; but as for that——"

"You have said enough," cried Abbas Khan; "be content The Mother is not to be trifled with, as you know. See, she speaks."

"I forgive you," she said to the Peer, "because thou art a holy

man; but beware, for thy tongue is apt to transgress the bounds of respect. And now, my lords, I rise again and take this respectable man of God with me. I will not long detain ye." Nor did she. The young Queen's apartments were close to the council chamber, and she was raised and carried to the archway door, where a screen had been let down, and a thin pale hand was put forth. D'Almeida feared the worst: there was a low cough; the pulse was weak and thready, and the girl complained of want of sleep and thirst. He could not then judge of her case, but he could alleviate present symptoms.

"Can your Majesty send anyone with me who can be trusted to bring the medicine? I shall seal it up with my own seal, and it will not be found disagreeable."

"Certainly," replied the Queen; "I can send one of my own eunuchs, who is known to Abbas Khan. But you have a messenger whom I desire to see, that is thy sister Maria. Can she come to this poor sufferer and cheer her? I will send a palanquin and an escort to-morrow, at noon."

"She shall wait on you with pleasure. Anywhere that she can be of use, Maria will go, as a point of duty to God and to her order. Yes, I will send her to-morrow."

"And she speaks Persian?" asked the young Queen, clapping her hands.

"A little," was the reply; "but Canarese better."

"Then we can all speak together, and she shall be my friend. And she is beautiful?"

"I think her most beautiful, lady; but she is my sister, and it ill befits me to speak. You will see and judge for yourselves."

"We may now rejoin our companions," said the Queen Regent. "And you love Abbas Khan?" she continued, inquiringly.

"I do," replied the priest, "as I would a son."

"And have seen no fault in him?"

"None. He is true and gentle, as a brave soldier ought to be. We were by chance cast together when his wound broke out again, and I could not leave him till he was fit to travel. He would have died alone."

"And thy sister," asked the Queen, "do they know each other?"

"Not at all, except by hearsay; and she hath never seen or spoken to him. In the village where Abbas Khan was ill for a month or more we had a different lodging; and, if abroad, she was always closely veiled. Since we have been here we lodge with a painter, for whom Maria makes designs."

"Now may God bless thee for this assurance! I had feared that Maria's beauty might—might——"

"Nay, lady, she is bound to God by her vow, and he is too honourable to think of her; but I may tell you, who are as his mother, that from snatches of his dreams when he raved and occa-

sional remarks, his heart hath gone out to the child who watched him in his first attack at Juldroog, Zóra."

"Ah!" cried the Queen, smiling, "it may be so. I saw him start when I used her name; but keep thy secret, Padré Sahib, as I will keep it, and we will see to this when he is gone."

"I will be silent," he returned. "Had it not been that my sister hath the same opinion, and that thou, noble lady, art as his mother, I had not told thee; but Maria can explain all, better than I can, and I will bid her make no concealment."

The assembly rose as the Queen entered the council hall, and, as she seated herself, again took their places. Francis d'Almeida, being conducted by a eunuch along a side corridor, entered by a curtained archway lower down, and took his seat as he had done before. Abbas Khan was completing his business with the Minister of Finance and various other officers, and the affairs of the sitting seemed well nigh concluded.

"Let all the officers of the army about to march appear at early durbar to-morrow," said the Queen. "Inshalla! there need be no delay."

"All is ready, may it please you," returned Abbas Khan. "My intention was to make a short march to-morrow afternoon, and afterwards to hurry on as fast as possible to the Royal camp, which lies somewhere between Sholapoor and Puraindah."

"We shall send to thy shrine at early morning, O Peer Sahib,

offerings to be distributed to the poor, and ask thy prayers for a victory over the State's enemies. Alas! that they should be our near relatives."

"My prayers and blessing will not avail much, I fear, lady, against what I have witnessed to-night," returned the Peer Sahib, haughtily and ungraciously. "Those that ask for them should obey the commands of Alla and his Prophet; nevertheless, I will submit my poor supplications to the Searcher of hearts."

It was well, perhaps, that the Royal lady affected not to hear what had been said, for she merely made an inclination of acknowledgment; and directing the usual complimentary dismissal gifts to be brought, rose after they had been distributed, and left the throne.

"Have you been mad to-night, Peer Sahib? Was your afternoon dose of opium too strong for thee?" asked Hyat Khan, who feared no priest, and in particular despised the Peer. "It is well she did not order thee to my humble dwelling."

"Silence!" cried the Peer, furiously. "Begone! and let me pass;" and gathering up the skirts of his robe, lest they should be polluted by the touch of anyone, he struggled out of the hall, leaning on his long staff.

"His jealousy has been aroused by you, Padré Sahib, and he is spiteful; take my advice and do not cross him again. I will send a guard of my people to thy lodging, they can both watch and protect."

As D'Almeida made his acknowledgments, Runga Naik, who had been busy writing in a corner, in a large, sprawling hand, approached the new Governor of Juldroog, and gave the letter to him.

"Take my advice," he said, "do not attempt to cross by the western ferry above the fall; turn off the main road at Talikota; make for Korikul, which belongs to me; ask for one Burma Naik, or, if he be away, for Kèsama, my wife; give either of them this letter, and they will give thee men and boats to cross the town ferry to the fort: this will save thee more than a day's march. Thou wilt be landed privately, close to the village; and the rest is in thine own hand, with three hundred of my people to help thee."

"If thou wouldst only go thyself, Runga," said Abbas Khan.

"No, no, Meeah!" was the reply, the tears springing to his eyes; "where thou goest I follow. If the Meer Sahib follows my advice, he will secure Osman Beg ere he rises from his bed the day after to-morrow. The people there will rejoice to be delivered from his insolence and tyranny. By Krjshna! do not send me, I should slay him; and his life—well, it is in the Lord's hands, worthless as it is. No, not with thee, Meeah; I must go to my people; I shall meet thee at the early durbar."

CHAPTER IX.

A DAY IN THE PALACE.

IT was late in the night before Francis d'Almeida reached his abode, but he found his sister awaiting his arrival; and his account of the events of the evening, after he had made up and despatched by the Queen's messenger a sealed bottle of medicine for the young Queen, was in the highest degree interesting to her. Francis had not intended to tell her of the rudeness of the Mussulman priest, but she told him that a guard of twelve men had arrived some time before, which had alarmed the whole household as well as herself. Nor when she had ascertained that they had been sent for their protection, could she imagine what danger threatened them; or if there were no danger, were they to be prisoners in spite of Abbas Khan's assurances? A few words from her brother soon, however, explained all; and he made light of the Peer Sahib's rudeness, which he told his sister was only what they must expect to endure as Christian missionaries.

"We have been spoilt too much," he continued, "by the good old Nawab of Moodgul and by our friend Abbas Khan; and in a city like this, full of fanatics and different religious bodies of Mussul-

mans, we may hardly expect to escape notice. But we have a good friend in the great Kotwal, and under the Queen Regent's protection we should have no fear. You will see her and her daughter-in-law to-morrow, at their special request, and we shall accompany Abbas Khan to the Palace at an early hour. I think you may be of use to that poor sufferer, the young Queen, whom they believe to be under a malignant evil spell; but who is either weakened by fever, or by some insidious complaint, which I humbly trust may not be decline, and yet I fear it. I want you to watch, since I may not see her face; and the eagerness with which she bade me assure her that you would come proves to me you will be heartily welcomed. Rise early, therefore, as I shall, and prepare yourself. Take some drawings and work with you, and I can promise you a happy and interesting day. You will not see much of the great Queen Regent, perhaps; but after she has given audience to the officers about to march to-day, she may have leisure."

Maria had no apprehension. Accustomed as she was to visit the harem of the Nawab of Moodgul, and to friendly and intimate association with his wife and children, she felt no embarrassment in visiting another Indian lady, even though she might be a Queen. Accordingly rising at daylight, she set aside what she needed to take with her; and her brother having prepared the medicines he purposed to administer, they partook of an early

breakfast, and were ready when the palanquins sent from the Palace arrived for them.

More than ordinarily lovely did his sister appear to Francis d'Almeida that morning. She had selected the finest of her lawn coifs and kerchiefs to wear, and their exquisite whiteness enhanced the rosy colour of her complexion, and harmonised with the purity of her fair neck and arms; while her soft brown hair, in natural ringlets, escaped from the coif and hung about her shoulders. To anyone who had never seen a pure European lady, she must, in spite of the sombre robe which concealed her graceful figure, have appeared a vision of beauty.

Old Donna Silvia, the wife of the painter, took her in her arms as she prepared to enter the palanquin, and kissed her affectionately and warmly, and bade her fear naught; and throwing the Queen Regent's beautiful Cashmere shawl around her head and shoulders, she entered the palanquin, closed the doors, and proceeded onwards with her old servant shuffling by her side.

At the gate of Abbas Khan's mansion they joined in his cavalcade, which, as well from his own retinue as the number of officers by whom he was accompanied, was of an imposing character. Maria would have liked to open the doors of her palanquin and look out at the richly dressed crowd of officers, many of them in glittering mail—at the magnificent caparisons of their horses,

bounding and prancing as they went, and of the huge elephants which accompanied them, the incessant clash of whose bells was almost deafening; but modesty forbade it, and she contented herself with such glimpses as she could obtain through the small jalousies of the doors which let in light and air. She could catch passing glances of Abbas Khan, whose noble figure and spirited charger were remarkable over all by whom he was surrounded, and inwardly prayed for a blessing on him, and protection in the new scenes of war into which he was about to plunge. She had not forgotten poor Zóra, nor her apparently hopeless love. She could discover no trace of her in the huge city; and far away as she must be, must inevitably, she thought, be forgotten in the excitement of the young Khan's life. She had not heard then from her brother the story of Zóra's violent abduction by Osman Beg, and her strange release by Runga Naik and his companions.

In this order the cavalcade passed on through the gloomy gate of the citadel, till their palanquins were put down at the private door of the female apartments of the Palace. Then, with cries of "Gósha! Gósha!"—privacy—by the eunuchs, a high screen of cloth was raised, and the door of Maria's litter was opened by her brother; and entering the deep archway, she observed the tall figure of Abbas Khan at the entrance of a wide corridor, beckoning them to advance. At the curtained archway in front she saw him hold a brief colloquy with one of the men who guarded it; and the curtain

was raised to admit them, as they entered what the Padré now recognised as the council room of the previous evening.

Involuntarily Maria started, as, looking up, she cast her eyes around, and followed the clusters of pillars which led up to the groined and fretted roof, covered with exquisite arabesque designs in pure white stucco, the principal lines and rosettes of which were of burnished gilding. Never could she have imagined so beautiful an apartment from the plain and almost mean entrance; and her brother, who had only seen it at night, when partially lighted, was equally charmed and surprised.

"How very beautiful!" she said, in a whisper. "Can all the interior of the Palace be like this? How exquisitely graceful is the tracery which covers the panels of the walls, and, mingling with the light clustered shafts of the corners and centre, leads the eye up to that richly ornamented ceiling. Would we could linger here, and that I had time to sketch portions of the designs."

"The Alhambra, which I once saw," returned her brother, "is perhaps more wonderful, and even more elegant; but this has been designed, probably, by some Spanish Moor with equal skill; and I hope you will have many opportunities of making drawings from it; but we must not tarry now, for the Queen-Mother awaits us;" and, leaving the council chamber, they entered the corridor by which the Queen had proceeded the evening before, until Abbas Khan paused before the entrance to the private apartments, while

one of the eunuchs gave notice to the Queen-Mother of their arrival, and returning immediately bid them enter. It was an antechamber to the room in which the Royal lady was awaiting them; and directly they approached her, she rose and greeted them with evident kindness and interest, bidding them welcome. When Abbas Khan had made his usual reverence to her, he said—

"I may leave my friends with you, mother, there is no need of me as interpreter; and it is time I should take my place in the durbar, for it is filling fast. I will return when your Majesty has dismissed it, if I am permitted to do so."

"Certainly, my son," she said; "but will not she take off her veil? We are longing to see the face of one in whom we have so strong an interest."

"Not before me, mother," returned the Khan, smiling; "but I depart, and commit them to your care;" and he left the room.

With a modest confusion, Maria now removed the shawl which she had thrown over her head, and also the embroidered veil by which her features were concealed, the finely crimped coif of her order, and the pure lawn handkerchief, being all that remained; but her soft curly hair had escaped in some degree, and fell over her neck and bosom in rich tresses, which, now the light touched them, shone like threads of gold.

"Power of God!" cried the Queen, "was there ever such

beauty seen? Rise, child; let me embrace thee! Wilt thou be to me as a daughter?"

They both rose, and the Queen, stretching forth her arms, enfolded Maria in a warm embrace, kissing her on the forehead and cheeks. "Sit down beside me, and do not tremble. If I be a Queen to all, I can be a mother and a friend to thee. How is it, Padré Sahib, that she is so lovely? Is this rosy colour real, or is it the custom of ladies of your country to paint their faces as we hear the Chinese beauties do? Nay," she continued, laughing heartily, "I see there is no need to doubt, for your fair sister's rising colour betrays her, and she blushes."

"She is like our mother," he returned, "who was perhaps more beautiful. But she is not used to compliments, which confuse her. Besides, she is vowed to the service of God since her husband's death, and can take no pride in self-adornment."

"And your mother lives?"

"We trust so," returned the priest; "but she hath other children near her, who follow worldly callings. We two have devoted ourselves to the service of the Lord, and are to her as though we were dead.'

"And your sister would not marry again, for she might have done so under your law?" asked the Queen.

"She might have done so to her worldly advantage," returned the Padré, "for several, both nobles and wealthy, sought her at

Goa; but she preferred the service of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and took her vows of poverty and relinquishment of the world upon her, joining me in my humble labours at Moodgul, where we were so happy, till Dom Diego insulted her, and Dilawer Khan sent us to your protection."

"Ye are brave people," returned the Queen, with a sigh, as it appeared, of admiration. "And ye desire nothing, and will accept nothing. Is it not so? Ah! where shall I find such devotion among the priests of our faith? The higher they are in rank and presumed holiness, the more they desire—estates, gifts, houses, elephants, money. Have you none like these in your Church?"

"We have, indeed, lady. We have priests who live like princes, and who rank as princes; who amass wealth and are greedy of honours. But we poor friars, and Sisters of Charity, have no part with these great dignitaries, and are content and happy with what God sends us, though it be humble food and poor raiment, for are not our souls cheered and warmed by Him; and care we know not."

"And we honour ye the more for this; and had it been seemly to do so, we had rebuked the insolent priest who was disrespectful last night. When my lord the King returneth he shall know of this, and respect thee, O Padré, as I have already learned to do, in truth. But come, Maria, I must lead thee to my little Queen

Taj-ool-Nissa, and leave ye together, while I take my place in the great assembly."

"I was about to ask, lady, whether she felt relief from the medicine I sent last night?"

"Ah! I had forgotten, Padré Sahib; and I fear it is Maria's fault; or is it that our poor natures too soon forget the highest benefits? She will tell Maria more than she has told me, I dare say; but her cough was better this morning, and she rested quietly, and had no evil dreams, and has eaten well. But come, we must lead thee to her, Maria; she is sitting in the balcony above the throne, where I must take my seat presently, and thou wilt see all that passes. Come!" and taking Maria by the hand, she led her through another antechamber into the young Queen's presence, bidding her make the same reverential salute to her that she had done to herself.

Taj-ool-Nissa was a slight girl, about seventeen years old; not so fair as the Queen Regent, but with an air of good breeding and distinction that could not be mistaken. Her seat of rich yellow satin cushions accorded well with her full petticoat and tunic of heavy cloth of gold, and the filmy brocade scarf of light blue muslin, which, confined at the waist, passed over her head. Several strings of large pearls and Venetian sequins hung round her neck, and her wrists and ankles were ablaze with bracelets and anklets of diamonds. Her features were decidedly pretty, though

the expression seemed vacant. Naturally so, it was possible, or under the influence of weakness, which was indeed very visible. The contrast between the girl and the Regent Queen was most striking; the one loaded with ornaments, yet not remarkable; the other wearing only pure white muslin, yet with a noble, intellectual expression which could not be mistaken.

For an instant, while the two ladies embraced each other, Taj-ool-Nissa did not see Maria except as a black figure taller than either of them; but when the Queen Regent took her by the hand and presented her, the expression of wonder and admiration in the young Queen's face was even more decided than the elder lady's had been.

Maria's expressive, soft blue eyes, her colour, the perfect whiteness of her skin, her delicate hands and silky hair, were so different from anything she had ever before seen, that her astonishment was even ludicrous, for the Queen-Mother laughed heartily, and chid her for apparent rudeness to a stranger; but this continued only for a moment, for Maria found herself drawn gently to the young Queen's heart, and held there.

"I have no one to be a companion to me," she said, the tears rising to her eyes. "Our beloved mother has too many cares and too much labour to sit with a weak, ailing girl like me, and you would be as a sister to me, Maria. And I hear you know so much, and can teach me so much, that my heart looks to you as it would

to a dear sister. Will you be one to me, and never leave me? See how well I am to-day, owing to your good brother's medicine; and I slept so pleasantly and did not cough. Oh, Maria! if he will only make me strong and well ere my lord returns, he will be rewarded by him gratefully."

"My brother will use all his skill, lady," returned Maria; "but it is only God who can restore you to health, and we will pray for you, if Christians may."

"Ye are both devoted to the Lord," she replied with feeling. "Oh! pray for me, and He will hear; but be seated near me that I may feel and caress you, and we can look out from the balcony into the great hall while the durbar is held; for all you will see, warriors and chiefs, are going to the aid of my lord and King. May God bring him to me safely!"

"My brother has sent some medicine for you," said Maria; "and if you will call for the person who is to have charge of it, I will give her directions."

"It is too precious, Tajoo," which was the familiar appellation of the young Queen, "to have any keeper but me," said Queen Chand, "and I will ask your brother, Maria, what to do with it when I return. Till then, sit here and see what we do, and he can feel Tajoo's pulse, if he will, meanwhile."

As she passed out they heard her speaking to Francis and a eunuch, who a moment afterwards summoned them both to the

door. Although he could not see Taj-ool-Nissa, Maria's description of her was sufficient, and her own assurance that she already felt better was very encouraging.

"She has narrowly escaped the decline which precedes consumption, for they have been keeping her too low; but as she gains appetite she will eat freely, and will do well if the Palace doctors and old women will let her alone."

"What did your brother say?" asked Taj-ool-Nissa, eagerly. And when Maria had explained it to her, she said, "He need not fear; I will do faithfully all he directs, and my beloved mother will give the medicine to me, and I will take it only from her hands. But tell him that I have always been delicate. I was so at Golconda, of which my dear father is the King; and he hoped I should be well here, which is a healthier place. And for a time I was better, and have even been out hunting with my lord and our mother; but lately I have fallen back again, and I have mourned in my heart that I should see my dear lord no more. Oh, Maria! he is so noble and so kind to me; he hath none else to love but me!"

And as she spoke, her large liquid eyes filled, and she laid her head on Maria's shoulder and sobbed gently, smiling through her tears. That place seemed to be a refuge to her already. "Hundreds of the ladies of the city come to visit me, and some pity me, Maria; but there is no one to whom my heart

goes forth but thee. But, hark! the nobut is beating, and we must take our seats in the balcony." Then, drawing a warm Cashmere shawl about her head and body, she took her usual place.

They looked out over the wide, lofty hall of audience, which has been described before. To Maria's perception it was a wondrous sight, both in regard to the hall itself and its magnificent proportions, and also as to the level space beyond, now a rich green sward filled with troops, whose armour and weapons glinted and flashed far more brightly in the unclouded sunlight than they had done on the day of the ordeal. The interior of the hall, though in shadow, was brighter by far than on that occasion; for the sunlight through the noble entrance archway—it is ninety-two feet in span—reached a considerable distance into the hall at that comparatively early hour.

All the commanders and officers of the army about to march, attended by their standard-bearers, had already taken their seats in rank down the hall, which, as there were no pillars, arches, or other obstruction to the sight, seemed almost to expand as the crowds of chiefs poured into it. Then the deep kettledrums of the nobut began to beat; and as the Queen Regent entered and took her seat upon the throne, all stood up and bowed themselves before her with profound reverence. Abbas

Khan, who stood near the steps of the throne, as it were, leading the movement.

"Is it not gorgeous, Maria!" exclaimed her companion, clapping her hands in joy. "Does not your heart swell at the sight? And they are all my lord's, and will go and fight for him. Hark to the shouts, 'Futteh-i-Nubba!' ('Victory to the Prophet!') 'Deen! Deen!' 'Futteh-i-Shah Ibrahim!' Oh, Maria! I feel as though I could go and fight with them for my dear, my noble lord; and, oh, our mother would go if she were at liberty, for when her husband was at war she was a warrior too, and never left his side. But, ah! I have been weak, and my king would not let me go. And I tell you truly, Maria, my father has as many soldiers as my lord, but he has no hall like this. Our durbar is a small place in comparison, but the troops assemble below the black terrace, and we used to look at them from the terrace of the palace. When the durbar is over I will take you to the rooms I like best, for they are higher than these; and if you open the windows you can see the whole city at your feet. All mine! all mine, Maria! because it is my lord's."

Thus she prattled on in high spirits, though Maria feared for the excitement, while the business of the durbar proceeded. One by one, as the names of the commanders were called, and the amount of their forces cried out, they presented the hilts of their swords to the Queen Regent and received her blessing; and many

of them, rejoining their men, marched them forth to the place of assembly. But some remained, and Abbas Khan was the last to offer his homage and take leave to depart. As he came up to the steps of the throne the Queen motioned him to come to her, and with her own hands tied round his right arm a small light green muslin scarf bordered with silver tissue, in which a coin had been folded in the name of the Imám Zamin, as she whispered, "Go, my son; honour and advancement are in thine own hands, and I know thou wilt not fail me or the King. Go; may Alla keep thee and restore thee to me as safely as I dismiss thee."

Then, as the Queen rose, the kettledrum sounded again, and Abbas Khan, stretching out his arm over his head, cried with a loud, manly voice, "Victory to our Queen-Mother!" which was taken up by those who filled the hall, and by the thousands without; and in a short time the hall and plain beyond were empty, except for a solitary court usher, or other attendant, who, flitting about singly, gave to the vast edifice an appearance almost of desertion.

As Abbas Khan passed the private entrance he sent word to the Padré to come to speak with him, and waited in the street for him. "How is the little Queen?" he asked. "Tell me truly for my lord the King."

"She is very delicate," was the reply; "but I do not fear. If my

directions are fulfilled, she will ultimately recover; and, though she may never be strong, she will pass an easy, happy life. But if she be neglected, I fear the worst. My lord, I will see to her as much as possible myself; and for part of every day Maria will be with her and direct her."

"And now farewell, my friend," said Abbas Khan, "for I have yet business at home, and we must assemble at Allapoor before sunset. Be careful of yourselves, and may Alla keep you. Do not cross the ill-natured old Peer Sahib; yet do not avoid him, or show any fear of him, nor, indeed, of anyone, for our noble Queen-Mother is your true friend and protector. Do not stay long to-day, for she is excited and wearied, but go every day to her, and take Maria with you; she can do more for Taj-ool-Nissa's happiness and the King's than she imagines. If you are at your house soon, come to me once more before I leave; but as the third watch begins to strike, I must put my foot in the stirrup and can wait for no one. Maria will often see my aunt at the Palace; let them be loving friends, as they should be, and may God have you in his keeping."

"What can I say for your kindness, my lord?" returned the Padré. "Our humble prayers attend you. Be not too rash if there be war, for a good leader ought not to expose himself to undue danger. All else I will remember, and the poor little Queen shall be closely watched. Maria was once in a similar

condition, and I feared for her; but you see how healthy she is now."

It was no easy matter to get away from the Palace. Taj-ool-Nissa had taken Maria up to the set of her own private apartments she most liked to live in. They were under the terraced roof, and were both lofty and airy, commanding, as she had said, a view over the whole of the citadel, including the elegant Palace of the Seven Storeys, and the city, as far as the high ground beyond Tórweh, a wide expanse, which was filled with noble palaces, terraced roofs, with streets, mosques, and minarets without number. To the north the huge mass of the mausoleum of Mahmood Adil Shah towered over all; and beyond the wall was the broad plain of Allapoor, dotted over with the white tents of the army.

They were interrupted by the Queen Regent, who appeared weary and anxious, as she threw herself on a pile of soft cushions and pressed her temples with her hands. "Alas!" she cried, "alas! and woe that it falls to-night to despatch our army against my own kinsfolk of Ahmednugger. Pity me, both of ye, my children! May such necessities as mine be far from ye. But they are factious and desperate, and would invade us if they were not checked. Yet I pray they may return within their boundary before there be blood shed. So grant it, O Lord most mighty!"

Then she was silent for a while, and seemed to pray; but

in a few moments she looked up more brightly, and rose to a sitting posture. "I have been taking my instructions from your good brother, Maria, about Tajoo's medicine, and talking to him about his life, and about the Dervish of Juldroog, and Zóra. He says you have, or had, a drawing of her made by yourself. Is it in your book? If it be, let me see it."

Maria feared she had left it behind at her house, but found it in the portfolio; and as she glanced at it, thought she had never done anything more correctly. It was a faithful likeness of the girl, with her sweet lips parted as if to speak; an earnest, glowing face, to be loved at first sight. She put the drawing into the Queen's hands, and observed her start visibly. "What a dear, loving face it is!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, it is all that," returned Maria; "and her heart is the same. I could show you a letter which reached me only yesterday, which she has written as she speaks, if your Majesty would like to see it;" and taking a small case from the pocket of her robe, she placed it in the Queen's hand. It was that we have already seen.

"It is charming, indeed," she said; "and I think there is a clue in my mind as to the person remembered."

"Ah!" cried Maria, "I had forgotten that. I ought not ——"

The Queen smiled as she interrupted the fair speaker. "Have no concealment from me, Maria; for he is my son, and I am her truest friend if she can be found."

"Found!" exclaimed Maria; "why she is at Juldroog, surely?"

"Alas, daughter! man's passion has been busy there also. Osman Beg offered her violence, but she was rescued by Runga Naik; and her grandfather and herself are wanderers. Yet she is safe, and we may be able to recover her. Osman Beg we have removed from his office, pending the King's arrival and pleasure."

Then Maria remembered the scene of the cataract, and the dead panther lying beneath the bastion, and Zóra's dread of the libertine Nawab; and was thankful for her rescue and escape. "He ought to be rewarded, that brave Runga, for he loves that child, and would give his life for her."

"And he shall be rewarded, Maria; for he is, indeed, a noble fellow, simple and truthful."

"Who is Zóra?" asked Taj-ool-Nissa; and she looked at the drawing, which was wonderful in her eyes.

"One who is very dear to Maria, and will, I hope, be dear to thee, Tajoo; but let Maria go now, for thou shouldst take thy medicine, and after it thou art ordered rest. I, too, am already weary, and would sleep awhile before the afternoon sitting."

"And Maria will come to-morrow, mother?"

"Certainly," said the Queen, answering for Maria, who felt as if excuse would be impossible.

When Abbas Khan returned home he found his aunt cheerful and resigned to his unavoidable absence. The family astrologer

had predicted a favourable journey, leading to honour; and it was Thursday when the Rujub-ool-Ghyb pointed to the north, the way he was to go. Other homely proceedings had removed all doubts. Yet the thought that to stay behind would have been a disgrace, and the charge of so large a body of troops would lead to high honour; above all, that her boy would be with his uncle and his foster-brother, the King, comforted her.

On his own part, he could only commit the Padré and his sister to her care; and ask her if she heard of the arrival of the Dervish of Juldroog in the city at any of the shrines to send for him, and offer him her hospitality till he should return himself, as he trusted shortly, and perhaps his granddaughter might be with him.

So the dear old lady embraced him, and tied a coin, dedicated to the Imám Zamin, in a green scarf upon his arm, with a fervent prayer. Her cheeks were wet with tears, but she had never seen him depart with so much confidence as now. Then as the Palace gongs sounded the third watch he mounted his horse and rode out of the courtyard; and the large nagaras or kettledrums of his household guards beating their hollow booming notes, they were taken up by those of the force, some of which through the north or Delhi gate were already in motion along the Allapoor road.

He had barely departed, when the Padré and his sister reached

home, and sent word to the old lady that they had to deliver a message from the Palace, and would come, if permitted, through the garden; and a kind answer being received in reply, they went to her. Maria had not, as yet, seen the Lady Fatima, and found her just the dear, kindly person she had imagined, and she was taken to her breast with unfeigned affection. On Maria mentioning that her brother was without, she desired a woman-servant to bring him in to her apartment. "I am too old not to be seen by a man of God," she said, laughing; and as Francis entered, she rose and saluted him.

"Your sister and I have already dispensed with ceremony," she said, "and I beg you to dispense with it also Señor Padré. I am a plain, homely woman, and desire to know one who has rendered such inestimable service to my son. And his wound is well?"

"Almost," he replied. "I have no fear about it; and he will be careful now, for it only requires rest."

Then he delivered the Queen's message, that she would bring Maria with her the next day, which she gladly assented to do; and gradually leading them to speak of Juldroog and their hosts there, she said frankly, "Ah! I fear Meeah left his heart there. Can you describe Zóra, whose name he murmured in his dreams?"

"I can show you a poor likeness of her," replied Maria, taking the drawing from her portfolio. "This is true, but it is not equal to her beautiful, innocent face."

"Ya, Alla! thou art merciful," said the old lady. "Such an one I had dreamed of for him; and I am thankful that such a face lies at his heart. May she be his in the end. And she loves him, Maria?"

"Nay," she said, modestly, "I cannot say; but her letter, which I may show to his mother, is, I think, true. Listen, and I will read it. Oh! that the motherless child could obtain such a protector." Then they conversed long upon past events, and Francis and his sister returned late to their home, grateful but wearied by the events of the day. And till the King's return the intercourse between Donna Maria and the Royal inmates of the Palace continued to afford deep gratification to all; while, under the skilful care of the Padré, the young Queen regained health and strength such as she had not enjoyed for a long time previously. She had proved an apt scholar in ornamental work, had made progress in drawing, and in reading Persian under the instruction of the old teacher who had taught her husband the King. Her former lassitude, weariness, and petulance had disappeared, and, instead, her bright, simple, ingenuous nature promised to be the foundation of a happy and useful life.

END OF BOOK II.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

A RAPID MARCH.

THE new Governor of Juldroog was a bold, active young officer, by no means likely to delay in assuming charge of the first considerable office with which he had been entrusted. Taking with him ten picked men of his own retainers, on whom he could thoroughly depend, and relying on the effects of the Queen's commission upon the present garrison of the fort, he left Beejapoor not long after midnight; for, accustomed to move anywhere at the shortest notice, he had little else to do than order his men to be ready, to give a few simple directions in his house, and to warn his scribe and secretary, Jewun Rao, an active young Brahmin, skilled in writing both Persian and Mahratta. All this was soon accomplished, and before the day broke the little party, with their lightly-loaded baggage ponies, were some miles on their road southwards, travelling at a steady pace, as befitted persons who could not risk failure by too great haste. They avoided, too, the larger villages and small towns; and, as all knew the country

perfectly, they had no difficulty in following the nearest routes without guides.

The day was cool and overcast, with a fresh breeze blowing from the south-west, which rendered travelling pleasant; and as there had been no rain for some days, the roads and the country in general were quite dry, and easy to traverse. About noon the party halted under a grove of mango trees, by which a small stream ran, and preparations were made for a good meal, which, indeed, was needed, and welcome to every one, for half the journey was already accomplished; and after taking a little rest they again mounted and pushed on. Here and there, as they passed near villages, the bastions were manned by matchlock men; but the Royal flag, which the Governor used as his standard, was too well known to be disputed, and as the evening closed in, they found themselves on the borders of the Beydur territory, only a few miles from their final destination, Runga Naik's town of Korikul. Now a doubt arose as to whether it would be most advisable to halt where they were for the night, or to proceed; but, all things considered, and to give rest to their horses, they determined to stay where they were.

The Patell, or head officer, who chanced to be a Mussulman, and the other authorities being summoned in the Queen's name, came, humbly offering forage and shelter and such food as the place afforded, while the Moolla conducted them to the humble mosque,

and bade them welcome. The hospitality of an Indian village is generally very sincere when those who need it belong to the ruling Government of the country, and come in a peaceful cause; and the new Governor of Juldroog was no bully to extort what he could obtain by conciliatory request. Comparatively soon, therefore, a sheep was slain, and converted into savoury kabobs, with the accompaniment of an excellent pilao, to which our friends, we need hardly say, did ample justice, for their first meal of the day had only been a very light and unsubstantial one. After it was over the Patell was summoned, and questioned as to the nearest road to Korikul, which none of the party had seen.

"Korikul!" exclaimed the Patell, in amazement; "that is not your way to Moodgul, if you are going there! Runga Naik's people are not used to the sight of soldiers of the Queen, and are likely to give you a rough reception, Meer Sahib. Of course I can give you a guide if you wish one, and my own son shall attend you, who is well known there; but still I advise you to avoid the place, and go by the high road, where there are good boats at the ferry, for the river is not fordable yet."

"But we have business with Runga's people; and with this," and he drew the chieftain's letter from his breast, "we shall, I hope, have no trouble."

"It is, indeed, Runga Naik's writing," said the Kurnum, or village

scribe, "and sealed by his seal, and addressed to his wife, Késama, and to Burma Naik, who is in charge of the place; but for all that it depends upon your business there, Sahib, what sort of a reception you get; and the Patell's son, whom they know, will be able to explain all you need. Or shall I come myself?"

"If I can only get speech of them, I will explain my own business," said the Governor; "and it is private, so that I have to tell it myself. Settle among yourselves who had best accompany me, and be ready before daylight; for as soon as the horses have had rest we ought to proceed, and there will be plenty of light from the moon."

"Yes, you should leave this soon after the second watch of the night," returned the Kurnum; "and while you sleep we will settle who is to go. There will be no trouble, Meer Sahib. You do not want any of them."

"Not I," was the reply. "Runga and three hundred of his men march to-morrow with the army, and I am to tell this, and something else, which is, as I said, private. Now let me sleep, Rao Sahib, for I am somewhat stiff and tired."

"It is time to get up, Meer Sahib," said the Kurnum, some hours later, shaking the shoulders of the sleeper. "I am ready myself, and the Patell, who will not trust his son, is ready also. He and his wife are seeing to a light meal which you had as well eat before you start, and your men and servants are taking theirs. So get up, sir; your horses are already saddled."

"How I have slept, to be sure!" said the Meer Sahib, yawning; "and I could have lain there till daylight; but I shall be ready directly;" and a servant entering with a vessel, poured water over his hands and feet, while the whole ablution was quickly completed, and the slight breakfast was a savoury and unexpected pleasure. Then the stout old Patell came ready equipped for travel, apologising for his early disturbance of his guest. "But the road is long and very stony," he said, "and I go with you because I know Eurma well, better than the Kurnum, for he hates Brahmins in general, and, if he happens to be in a bad humour, will open the gate to no one. If he thought you wanted him or any of his people to account for anything, your first welcome would be a shower of matchlock balls which would empty some of your saddles."

"I am heartily obliged to you, my friend," replied the Meer Sahib. "By all means take the matter into your own hand. With any one but a Syud, as you are, I should be suspicious; but I can depend upon you. Now I am ready, Bismilla! let us proceed;" and with an echo of the cry from his men, the party set out at as quick a pace as the narrow path would allow.

At first it led through fields; but when they ceased, a short thorny jungle began, while so narrow was the path that only one person could proceed at a time. This thorny tract was in fact the frontier of the Beydur district, and was kept as unbroken as

possible to keep out enemies or marauders, as also parties of the clan who might be returning pursued from freebooting expeditions in the adjacent countries. Every path that led into the open country beyond was made or left as crooked as possible, constantly breaking into other smaller ones, which, unless the right one were known, led into wilder spots, or ceased altogether.

They were tracks, too, that could easily be defended upon any emergency. Sometimes small breast-works, like low walls of rough stones, crossed the road, which could be held against a large number by a few men; and, again, similar breast-works occupied the crests or sides of low rocky hills, or isolated piles of granite rock. At night the tracks, the thorny bushes, and rude fortifications seemed more formidable than they really were at daylight; and the dim moon, partially overcast with clouds, made every object indistinct and mysterious after a strange fashion.

The young leader saw at once that, without a very competent guide, he and his men might have wandered through these ever-varying tracks and jungles, which continued for several miles, without a hope of finding their way to their destination; and it was fortunate, indeed, that he had chanced to find a friendly village and a hospitable Patell of his own faith whom the Beydurs of Korikul could trust.

"We could never have found our way, Sheykhjee," said the

Governor, "without you or without torches, and I am grateful to you."

"You would not have discovered it with them, Meer Sahib," returned his companion. "If torches had been seen gliding about in this jungle you would have found yourselves beset speedily and helplessly. There would have been no parleying with you; but, instead, you would have been in the power of my not over scrupulous friends. It is, indeed, a mercy that you did not attempt it. But see, the last small pass brought us out of the jungle and the rocks; and we are now in the open country, which, as you will see, is fertile and well cultivated; for the Naik of Wakin-Keyra is careful of his people. Now we can push on faster, Meer Sahib; and we shall be at the gates of Korikul by daylight, or soon after; shall we not, Ramana?" he asked of his horn-blower, who was walking beside his master's palfrey, holding on by the crupper.

"Sooner, perhaps," said the man; "and you need not arrive before the gates are opened for the day."

So they proceeded, answering challenges from village towns and bastions by a few notes on the Patell's horn, which seemed to be understood, for they were not molested. Gradually the chill wind which precedes dawn blew over the face of the country, and moaned through the trees they were just clearing. Packs of jackals began their last howlings before they went to rest,

and others took up their cries, which seemed to extend far and wide. Lapwings and plovers had roused with the last watch of the night, and piped or wailed to each other as they took their early flights; or, roused by the travellers, flew up into the air, and, caught by the wind, flew screaming to leeward. The moon was fast sinking into a belt of dark grey clouds near the horizon, while the eastern sky showed a perceptibly brighter tint which spread gradually over that region, though, as yet, there was none of the colour of dawn. Then, on the banks of a small stream, the Patell called a halt, waist cloths were spread, and the early prayer said by all the Mussulmans of the party; and, after it, hookahs went round with many a jest and laugh of good companionship. As the cocks began to crow and the dogs to bark in a village not far off, they mounted again and pursued their way.

As daylight increased, it would have been difficult, perhaps impossible, for the young leader of the party to have made his way through the country without his guide, for at every village men armed with long Beydur matchlocks manned the bastions and gate-towers of the villages, as well as the central place of refuge, which, in appearance and size closely resembling a Martello tower, commanded the village and adjacent approaches. Drums were beaten, the village horn-blowers blew quivering blasts upon their instruments, and men shrieked and yelled in that peculiar manner which, when Beydurs are excited, is not pleasant to hear; but a

few notes from the guide's horn seemed to have the invariable effect of quieting the commotion, and in most instances parties of the village guards ran out to hold a brief colloquy with the old Patell and his companions, only to be assured of peaceable intentions and the Queen's service. The Governor saw that all the villages, neatly built of the laminar limestone of this part, and covered with thinner portions like slate, were evidently prosperous and thickly inhabited; and that their lands were well cultivated and bore heavy crops of grain and pulse, while the people were comfortably clad and cattle were abundant. If the Beydurs were vicious and robbers without their boundaries, as they had the reputation of being, they were, at least, quiet and industrious within; watchful and prepared to resist any irrruption of marauders from without.

The sun was just rising when the old Patell, who was leading, stopped and pointed out smoke, which appeared above a grove of tamarind trees at a little distance; and as they gained the summit of a slight rising ground, the town of Korikul lay just before them. In the centre was a castle, with walls about fifty feet high, and towers well built of stone, from the highest of which floated the standard of Runga Naik, being a large green field with a white border, and a figure of Hunooman (the Monkey God) and patron saints of the Beydurs displayed on it; while similar flags were flying from the gate towers and bastions. Some neat

buildings in the upper part of the castle, cleanly whitewashed, were evidently the dwelling places of the family ; and below was a large open courtyard, which led into other yards—all surrounded with stone walls, with bastions at intervals—and containing large stacks of grain and forage. The entrance to the outer gate of the castle was intricate, leading through a succession of narrow traverses between bastion loopholes for musketry. Before modern artillery such a place could not be held for an hour ; but at the period of this chronicle the Castle of Korikul was a strong place, and could be defended by a thousand or more stout Beydurs, many of whom lived in the town and others in the villages around, who held lands for their services—all forming part of the numerous militia of the province, which was twelve thousand strong.

The space around the outer walls of the castle, and between them and the inner wall—which was also of stone, and protected by circular bastions—was filled with narrow irregular streets, and stone houses roofed with slate, tiles, or thatch, as it pleased the owners. One street—broader than any other, and leading from the gate to the castle, or palace as it was called—was pointed out by the Patell as the Bazar, in which there were shops of cloth merchants, money dealers, braziers, and grain and flour dealers. Beyond the inner walls was a large populous suburb of weavers, each house having its yards for dressing yarn for the loom ; while, mingled with them, were dyers' yards, where white yarn was dyed

of various colours to suit the manufacturers. A small stream ran past the town, the bed of which was already crowded by bathers, washers of yarn, cattle drinking before they went to graze, or standing and lowing in the shallow pools. Altogether, with the fine tamarind and mango trees around, the low rugged hills covered with brushwood, stretching into the distance, the scene was cheerful, prosperous, and peaceful; and a softened beauty seemed to pervade all the landscape.

Such was the thriving town of Korikul at the period we write of. But it is sadly different now. The outer walls and bastions as well as the inner ones, are broken down in many places, part of the castle has fallen in, and the whole is in a ruinous condition. The town is full of heaps of stones and earth which once formed substantial houses, and the Petta, or weavers' suburb, has almost disappeared. The chief, a descendant of Runga Naik, no longer resides in the ancient castle, but in one of the outlying buildings, which may have been that inhabited by Burma. He retains his ancestral lands, and the Beydur militia on the frontier are under his charge; but heavy oppressions and exactions drove most of the families of weavers from the town; their places have not been filled, and though some of the old stock remain, the amount of manufacture is not a tithe of what it used to be. As to the Beydurs, they have no forays now, no expeditions into more peaceful lands to boast of, or wealth of spoil. They are reduced

to the condition of quiet husbandmen and farmers, retaining, however, their pride of race, kept up by recitations by their bards of the deeds of their ancestors.

From the rough character of the country beyond the town, and, indeed, surrounding it on two sides, it was evident that the open cultivated tract did not extend further; and this, we may observe, resulted from the change from the trap and limestone formation to the rugged granite hills, and strange piles of rocks, which continued to the ravine of the cataract and to Juldroog, about eight miles beyond, to the south.

As the strange party stood for a few minutes on the summit of the ridge, it was evident that they were observed by the watchmen in the castle towers, for drums were beaten, horns blown, and a general stampede of people and cattle ensued from the river bed and fields around. Then some matchlock shots were fired, and a ball from a heavy wall gun or field-piece which stood upon one of the castle bastions, which went whizzing over their heads at a high elevation.

"That was not meant for us, Meer Sahib," said the Patell, laughing, "but only as a warning. These poor Beydurs have many enemies, and they need to look out carefully against surprises. Blow, Krishna," he said to the hornblower beside him; "let us see if that satisfies them."

This time the blast was much longer and more elaborate,

and ended with a wonderful flourish, which did the performer much credit; and almost immediately was answered by exactly the same blast from the tower of the castle. "That is Krishnya's horn, and his master is with him. I see the old man," said the horn-blower, "and it was a friendly blast."

"Who, then, are the Mussulman soldiers with him, and what has he to do with the King's men?" said the head watchman. "Go and tell Burma Naik or the lady, while I go to the gate and inquire. It seems something uncommon."

The lady Keysama had been long astir. She was an active, homely woman, with a decidedly uncertain temper, amenable to none but her husband, whom she feared as well as respected, and loved, in her own way, very faithfully. In her Runga Naik had absolute confidence, for fear was unknown to her; and had there been occasion at any time, she would have defended the castle while one stone remained on another. The lady was a practical and active housewife, too; and, on the churning day, when ghee was to be made, and Brahmins feasted, and the whole house must be absolutely pure, it was not likely that fresh plastering the floors with liquid mud would be neglected. This was a duty which the lazy hussies, who were her slaves, could not be trusted with; and accordingly the town trumpeter found her overlooking the work, with her sáré tucked in above her knees, and a chubby child sitting astride on her hip, in the long front verandah of the entrance to the castle.

"What hast thou been blowing thy horn so much for, Bheema, disturbing everybody? If thou wantest to blow, couldst thou not have gone into thy fields and scared away the birds?"

"But, lady, some people are at the gate and demand entrance in the name of the Queen Chand."

"Tell them to go away. If they don't go, wake Burma Naik, and tell him to fire on them. Be off, and do not interrupt me! Ah! dost thou dare to look up at my girls, Bheema," she continued, aiming a blow at him with the long bamboo staff on which she was leaning. "Away with thee, impudent, and do what I tell thee."

"Unless Burma comes to her, I might as well talk to a stone," the man muttered to himself, as he turned away; "and Burma is asleep after the feast on wild hog he had last night. I hope Arjoona has awoke him, for I dare not."

That had apparently been effected some time, for as the horn-blower entered the outer court of Burma's house, he saw him sitting in his usual place. He was tying a checked handkerchief round his head, loosely and very much awry; his face was bloated, greasy, and swollen; his eyes red, and with evident signs that his potations had been long and deep the night before. He was yawning, and spluttering out Canarese oaths at every interval, and was, indeed, by no means pleasant to behold. We have seen him before, a stout, active soldier, assisting little Zóra to escape; but

now he was in a different mood, and of different aspect. The vermilion marks on his forehead, nose, cheekbones, and eyebrows, were blurred and partly rubbed off; his hair was dishevelled, and hung about him in unkempt locks; and the scowl on his face bespoke impatience of anything he might have to hear, and vexation that his sleep had been broken.

"The King's soldiers," he said, contemptuously, "what do they want? What brings the King's soldiers here? What induced that meddlesome old Patell, Shekh Abdoolla, to show them the way? By the Gods! he shall answer for it; let him look to his cattle pens. What does he say? what does he want?"

"He will not tell me," replied the man, "nor the Chitnees, who is talking to him from the bastion by the gate. He says the jemadar of the Royal troops has an order from the Queen, and a letter from Runga Naik to our lady; but he will give up neither except to you and to her together."

"Some requisition for forage, or grain, or money, I suppose," returned Burma, with a sneer; "for the Queen does not write to us except to make a demand. Why did you not tell me this first, and they would have been gone before now with a shower of balls flying after them."

"But," urged the man, putting up his hands in supplication, "what about the master's letter? There may be some order in it."

"If there were," retorted Burma, "he would have sent some

of the men with it, not the Queen's jemadar. It is no letter of his, but only a decoy. Go, tell the men to give them warning, and if they don't depart, to fire on them."

Thus it seemed very probable that no message would be delivered, and the Queen's party and their guide driven away; but the last spokesman to Burma Naik was pertinacious, and insisted that Runga's letter should be received, even from the Mussulman leader.

"Suppose there is anything important in it, and you turned it away. I do not think you would be very safe, master, if my lord knew of it, though you are Burma Naik."

"Humph!" grunted Burma, "there is something in that; and what does the lady say?"

"She will have nothing to do with it, and you are to act as you please. If there is anything addressed to her, you can come and tell her."

"How many want to enter? And how many are there in all?"

"Ten men and their leader, with old Shekhjee and his Kurnum, and some grooms and baggage ponies, and a Brahmin."

"Sons of vile mothers!" exclaimed Burma, as he aimed a blow at the horn-blower. "Could ye not have told me this before? By your long face one would have thought there had been five hundred of the King's horse. Go! Admit the leader, his grooms and scribe, old Shekhjee and the Kurnum. We shall soon get to the bottom of all. Tell the rest to remain without."

All this had taken much time, and the Meer Sahib's patience was well nigh exhausted; but the old Patell kept him quiet. "Burma Naik was drunk last night, I suspect," he said, "and was not easy to wake, nor in good humour when awakened. Be patient, and we shall soon know."

Nor, indeed, was it long before the horn-blower and his companion arrived; and, speaking from the wicket of the gate, saluted the Meer Sahib and the Patell, and informed them they had permission to advance and present the letter. The ponderous gate was then opened, and, the Patell leading, both entered the outer enclosure, and rode up the Bazar.

The residence of Burma formed part of the entrance to the outer court of the castle, for he was a near relative, and entitled to dwell in the vicinity of the lord of Korikul. So they were ushered in. They found Burma Naik more presentable than he had been—now washed, and with plain but decent clothes. His usual seat had an embroidered cloth spread over it, cushions were placed for others, and his sword and shield laid out before him. As they approached he rose and saluted them with an awkward but courteous gesture, and bid them be seated, apologising for the precautions he was obliged to take against marauding parties, which came upon all sorts of pretences. "And where are the letters?" he asked. "They say there are some from the Queen, and from my cousin Runga Naik, to me and the

lady Keysama. Pray deliver them. This, indeed, is from the Queen," he continued, observing the Royal seal, and he put the letter to his head and eyes; "and it is addressed to the lady Keysama, in Persian, which I cannot read, and in Canarese, which I can read, by Runga Naik himself. There is no doubt now; may I open that addressed to me?"

"Certainly," returned the Meer Sahib; "you will then see what is to be done, for Runga Naik wrote it before me with his own hand."

"Sure enough, it is his own seal and superscription," said Burma, opening the cover, while, unfolding the letter, his eyes ran rapidly over the contents. "Will I help, O Meer Sahib!" he cried, the whole of his face brightening with excitement. "Ah, sirs, it is a welcome service to perform; and you, too, are my lord now," and he rose and saluted him. "Under Runga Naik's order, this place and all that are in it are at your disposal. I grieve only that there was any semblance of rudeness shown to you. I will send for your companions, and ye are all to be the lady Keysama's guests as long as ye stay, yet ye ought not to delay."

"We are ready to go on now, sir," said the Meer Sahib, "if it be advisable."

"Not yet," returned Burma; "the boats have to be prepared, and some men who are the oarsmen summoned. We require two more boats than are now at the ford; but they will be

all ready by the evening. Meanwhile rest yourselves and take food; to-morrow we shall break our fast in the fort, and you, sir, will be its Governor, instead of that false traitor and tyrant, Osman Beg. What sayest thou to that, O Sheykhjee? Dost thou not rejoice to hear it?"

"I do, I do, with thanks to the Almighty," said the Patell, "who has heard the prayers of his servants. If it were only for his violence to my poor old friend's granddaughter, who should have been sacred in his eyes, he deserves death. Would I could go with ye."

"Thou wilt soon hear," replied Burma; "and if thou wilt remain till to-morrow, when we are quiet, come to us. Thou hast done good service in leading my lord hither direct, for if he had wandered to the upper ford, Osman Beg would have heard of it, and filled the fort with loose characters, of whom there are always enough and to spare. To do him justice, the Nawab can fight, and we should have had much more trouble than we shall have."

"I will come down to Jumalpoor early to-morrow," was the old Patell's reply, "and so make no delay. You had better fire a gun at daylight, that will be enough for me; and perhaps when my lord writes to the durbar he will mention the little service I was able to render."

"That I will, my friend," said the Meer Sahib; "but come now

to the mosque, and you shall tell me about Osman Beg, and what he has done."

"Certainly," returned the Patell, "I have some business in the fair to-day, but that does not fall till late; come, and take my blessing, and prayer for the success of thy good work."

The lady Keysama did not appear. She could not admit strangers, aliens in faith, while the holy ceremonies were going on, but she sent her thanks for her husband's letter, and garlands of flowers with her blessings and prayers for success.

In the afternoon the whole party again set out, guided now by Burma Naik, who took with him fifty additional men, and skirting the rugged granite hills which border the Dóne, they reached the hamlet of Jumalpoor, about two miles from the great river's bank, opposite to the town end of the island fort, as night closed in. Then they heard that the boats were being dragged up from below, and would be at the ferry before midnight.

CHAPTER II.

A SUCCESSFUL SURPRISE.

"IT is time for us to go on, Meer Sahib," said Burma, as he reached the place where the new Governor was lying, under some trees close to the half-ruined village. "Come."

"And our horses; what is to be done with them?"

"Leave them here, under charge of the grooms, and you can send for them afterwards; if indeed you care to have them in the fort, where you cannot ride. They will be quite safe here. At present they would be a serious embarrassment to us; and if one neighed, the whole fort would be alarmed, and I cannot tell what would happen."

"And can you tell now, my friend?"

"Pretty well. We shall land at a spot not far from the old Syud's house. May God have him and his child in His keeping. I will send to the Jemadar Sheykh Baban Sahib, and tell him to come to you with a few men on whom he can depend. He has always disliked Osman Beg, but they have been nearly at open feud since the night poor little Zóra was carried off, and was almost married to the Governor. Sharp words passed between

them on that occasion, and the act produced such indignation among the garrison of the fort and our Beydurs who are on duty [illegible] that I marvel Osman Beg escaped, or was not put to death. I am taking thirty more of my best men with me, and, with yours and mine together, we are more than a match for any who may dare to oppose us. But no one will draw a sword, Meer Sahib," continued Burma, laughing, "except it may be the four Abyssinian slaves he has and his actual retainers, who are not more than ten in number, if there be so many. I spared him once, the night we, Runga and I, and Bheema, the horn-blower, who hooted like a horned owl as our signal, rescued little Zóra, for Runga would not let me go in and slay him as he slept; but if he crosses me now, by all the Gods, he dies."

"No, no, my friend, it must not be so," returned the Governor, earnestly. "His life must be spared, for there are many accusations against him, which our Royal mistress would fain have unravelled."

"Ah! about Eyn-ool-Moolk and Elias Khan, and the Padré at Moodgul, who is gone to Goa," returned Burma, laughing; "but we know all about that. Why did not the Nawab send that fierce priest instead of the gentle Padré, of whom all lament the absence? Then they would have found out everything at Beejapoor. But it is an old story now."

"Hardly, my friend. It is not three months since Abbas Khan

slew Elias, and Eyn-ool-Moolk was then at his busiest. To me it does not matter, but the Queen's orders must be obeyed; and Abbas Khan could not be sent here, as he has taken a division of the army to the King's camp; and Runga, as you know, has gone with him."

"Yes, so Runga wrote in the letter; and his wife fell to crying about it, and would not see you. Runga, methinks, is a fool for his pains; but he loves that boy as if he were his own son, and there is no use in any of us trying to persuade him that he is a fool for following him. But we loiter, Meer Sahib. Come! my people are already departing in small groups, and your men had better divide and follow; we shall meet them again at the river side, where the boats are." And after a few directions to their followers, Burma and his companion entered the narrow intricate path through the then thick jungle which led to the water's edge.

Very different now was the appearance of the Beydur Naik from that he presented when he had been awakened that morning. He had bathed and thoroughly purified himself from the excess of the previous night. He had put off the gay clothes in which he had dressed himself at Korikul, and was now attired in the usual war dress of his clan, the conical leather cap, with soft leather drawers, leggings, and sandals.

For arms he wore in his waistband a long knife-dagger, and a sword with a long Genoa blade, while a small shield hung

at his back completed his equipment. Nor, indeed, were there many matchlock men among the party, for the place, if it resisted at all, must be carried sword in hand. No one spoke except in a whisper, and the Governor felt assured that the men who were with him knew their work thoroughly, and were confident of success.

Such was the interest that this stealthy march excited in the young Governor's mind, that they had reached the bank overhanging the Krishna before he had thought it even near. He had not yet seen the fort, for it had been concealed by trees; but he had heard the dull plashing murmur of the river, and occasionally a deeper moaning sound which mingled hoarsely with it, and for which he could not account.

Presently the path rose a little, and the broad river and giant mass of the fort were disclosed. Not clearly, however, for the waning moon was dimmed with clouds, and none of the details of the rugged hill were visible. What could be seen of it seemed to blend with the hills beyond the river, indeed, to form a part of them. But the gloom, the strange conical hill, and the rushing water of the river, formed altogether the most impressive scene the young Governor had ever looked on.

"Ha!" said Burma, in a hissing whisper. "Look! our friend up yonder holds revel to-night, and the Gods favour us. O Krishna! I vow to thee ten sheep at the Temple of Gopalswami,

and to feed a hundred Brahmins, if thou aid us, as thou didst Arjôona in the field of Kooroo Kshétra; and to thee, O gentle nymph Cháya, a pooja and a feast to a hundred Brahmins at thy shrine." And he held up his joined hands towards the river, while, at the same time, he bowed his head in reverence. "She lives there, Sir," he said, simply, "up in the rocks yonder, above the pool; and we, who live here, reverence her, and propitiate her."

"Her! who?" asked his companion.

"Only Cháya Bhugwuti, who dwells in the cataract, which you will see to-morrow. Now, I know she is placable and kind, as she was the night we crossed for Zóra; and she is always to be depended upon when justice has to be done."

"But you said he was at his revels. Who?"

"Who? why Osman Beg to be sure. Don't you see the lights in the palace up yonder, and torches flitting to and fro?" and Burma pointed to lights which seemed high up in the sky. "That steady light is in the palace; and hush! do you not hear music?" The sound was music, of beating of drums, and of fiddles, and women's voices mingled, which faintly reached them, as a light puff of wind blew from the fort.

"What fun it will be, Meer Sahib! what fun!" cried Burma, rubbing his hands and chuckling. "What fun to catch the Nawab Sahib and his companions altogether. But we must wait awhile

till they are properly drunk. They are pretty well on by this time, and to judge from what I have seen and tasted, the Feringi wine the Nawab gets from Moodgul is not weak. Come down to the river-side and watch; I see my people there, though to you they appear like so many stones," and they descended the rocky path together.

"Ye have done well, Nursinga," said Burma to a tall, powerful man, who came forward as they reached the foot of the descent. "How many boats have ye brought?"

"There are six in all, four large and two small; and we should have been here earlier but for people who will attend the anniversary to-morrow, and two companies of dancing women who have vows to perform and are singing to the Nawab. It took a good while to take them all across and bring back the boats; but they are all ready. Will you cross now, master? Cháya Bhugwuti is very quiet at present; but there have been clouds in the west all day, and if rain has fallen, who can answer for her?"

"Is there any one in the house of the old Dervish?" asked Burma.

"Not a living creature near it except Zóra's pigeons. I went through the place before sunset, for some of the dancing women wanted to put up there; but I told them and their people that since the old man and Zóra left, ghosts and devils had taken possession of it, and tormented those who went there. Then some of

the girls looked in, and something moved in a dark corner—I think it was poor Zóra's old cat—and I cried out 'Tiger! tiger!' and they all ran away. Yes, it is quite empty, master."

"Then we will cross as soon as the lights up there are put out, Meer Sahib; and meanwhile I will send a small boat-load of men across. Go, thou, Nursinga, send for some of our men from the village; and tell the Jemadar that he must meet me with a few of his men on the King's service, for there is some work to do, and that I will meet him in the Dervish's house; and tell him what it is. Go at once, and, when you are ready, light a small fire on the terrace roof of Zóra's zenána."

The man made a deep reverence, and stepping into the smallest of the basket boats, in which six men were lying, roused them, and pushed it into the stream; and it was anxiously watched over the rapid current till it entered the backwater beyond, and was quickly rowed along until it reached the landing-place close to the house we already know.

Nursinga did not delay in his errand. First he ran to the house of the head of the Beydurs who were on duty in the fort, and roused him. "There is some work to do, brother," he said, "and the master is waiting to cross. Take twenty men, and go to meet him at the Syud's house."

"What is it?" asked the other, anxiously.

"How am I to know? Are we in Burma Naik's secrets?

Enough that we obey. Is Sheykh Baban Jemadar gone up to the palace?"

"Not he, nor any of the men, except a few profligates who would go anywhere after the women that dance. And they are drinking much; twice have the cans come down for spirits."

"Come, then; let us take the old man with us to meet the master, and he will know what he wants."

The house of the Jemadar of the garrison was close by, and the two men went at once to it. Some persons on guard were sitting in the outer verandah, near the door, smoking, who challenged them; but taking the message to their master, he was soon aroused, and understood what was required; and, having given orders for the assembly, very silently, of his men at various points, so as to be within call, he, with a few attendants, accompanied Nursinga to the deserted house.

"May his house become desolate who made this desolate!" said the old soldier to one of his subordinates. "How pleasant it used to be to hear the holy Dervish preach the word of the Prophet, and to see Zóra, like a beauteous flower, among us! I say, Let his house be desolate who made this desolate; for Alla is just, my friends—just and watchful!"

"Ameen! Ameen!" was the response from several as they sat down in the verandah so well known to all, and began to smoke, while the Beydur had proceeded to the roof of the cloister, col-

lected a few dry sticks and leaves, and, striking a light with a flint and steel, blew some tinder placed between dry leaves into a blaze, and lighted the little fire, which flamed up for a moment and went out.

"That is enough, Meer Sahib," said Burma, who had been watching. "Now we know that Sheykh Baban is there, my men are there, and the lights have been out some time in the palace. There is no need for delay now; come. 'Bismilla!' as you say; or, as we Beydurs cry, 'Hari Ból!' Let us embark and lead, and the boats will follow in turn, one after another. Bring half of your people with you, the rest can follow, and with me and some of my folk the boat will be heavy enough. Now, friends, sit close and sit steady. Jey Cháya Bhugwuti! Jey Krishna Mata!" he cried, throwing water into the air at each invocation; while the boat danced down the rapid for a little, and was soon turned into the backwater by its powerful rowers, who worked with muffled paddles. An instant more and they had landed, and, under cover of the thick wood, were making the best of their way to the house, while two of the rowers pulled the boat up the stream, and fastened it to some bushes near the back of the old house.

The movement had been so silently effected that those who were concealed there knew nothing of the arrival of the new party; and it was not till the burly form of Burma Naik stood among

them that they were aware of his presence. All had started to their feet, but their apprehension was at once relieved when the Naik, in his hard Canarese tongue, so that all should understand, said aloud, "Sheykhjee, I bring you your new Governor from Queen Chand Beebee; come and kiss his feet and salute your new chief, for he is honourable and worthy."

There was not a moment's hesitation, dark as it was. While the Jemadar Sheykh Baban offered the hilt of his sword, and grasped the hand of the new-comer in an earnest "Salaam Aliekoom," his example was followed by all the Mussulmans present; while the Beydurs, after their own fashion, touched the Meer Sahib's feet and neck, and thus swore fealty to him.

"Make a torch of straw," said Burma, "and let the Governor read his own commission and show the Queen's seal before we advance, which will assure all that this act is done on the part of the Government, and not as robbers or rebels." The materials were soon found, and as the twisted grass burst into a blaze, the commission was well read by the scribe whom the Meer Sahib had brought with him; the Queen's seal, and the green official paper on which the order was written, were examined by all.

This brief process formed a strange scene; the figures of those present stood out from the black darkness beyond with vivid distinctness, while their faces, in which wonder and excitement struggled for mastery, wild and strange as many of the Beydurs were,

formed a sight which none who witnessed ever forgot; and a shepherd boy who had paid an early visit to his fold declared next day that witches and demons were holding revel like the Nawab above, and that he had seen forms moving about in a bright flame that was burning, which wonderful story was confirmed in the minds of many simple folk by seeing that day the black ashes of the fire scattered about the verandah.

"Now then, Sahib, I humbly represent that I and mine are ready," said the old Jemadar. "Any one the noble Queen sends to us is as our father and mother; and, as your face is bright and kind, we hope you will be good to us, your servants, and protect instead of oppress us; and so your name shall be honoured while in future our evening lamps will be lighted in your name. Bismilla! Come on!" and, drawing his sword, he led the way to the gate of the village.

In the little market-place many men had gathered together, doubtful as to the real nature of the movement; but it spread quickly from mouth to mouth, while the three leaders pressed on up the steep ascent without pausing, being joined by parties stationed in various bastions and guard-houses, one after another.

At the last division of the ascent, where the party must emerge from the narrow pathway overhung with rocks, by which they had been concealed hitherto, there was a brief colloquy among the leaders and a division of the work made to each. Burma Naik

with his men were to turn in by the broken wall, near the kitchen; the Meer Sahib and the Jemadar were to carry the front court and verandah of the palace, while a third party of Beydurs were to prevent all chance of escape on the north side.

As yet no one had given an alarm; but a man posted on the highest look-out tower fancied he smelt the smoke of match-rope and heard low whispers, and looking over the edge of the parapet saw the forms of men gathered together in groups. His vision was not very clear, for he had been drinking hard; but there was evidently no doubt, for the men below him were moving, and he fired his matchlock. Happily the ball hit no one, or the consequences would have entailed bloodshed; as it was, and in the condition in which those in the palace were, the report had little effect in arousing anyone, and the approach of a hostile party was of all events least expected.

As Burma turned into the rear entrance, the Governor and his men were in front, and with a sudden rush they leaped upon the basement of the palace and burst open a door of the audience hall. Johur and another of the Abyssinian slaves tried to oppose those who entered, but it was only for a moment, when they were bound and passed outside to be guarded. The hall itself was a strange sight. As the latter part of the night had been chilly, the dancing women—when the dancing ceased—and the musicians and followers lay down where they were, wrapped in sheets, and had

fallen into profound sleep; and now one and then another of those sleeping figures awoke, rubbed its eyes, and, in the case of the women, rent the air with piercing shrieks and cries for mercy. First it appeared as if a band of dacoits or robbers had surprised them, and the loss of their jewels and ornaments was the least they expected. There was a dim lamp burning in a niche which partly revealed the scene, and the agitation of some thirty helpless women now huddling together on the ground, and imploring mercy. It was well that the entrance doors were guarded by the Meer Sahib's retainers, for the Beydurs would have had little scruple in tearing off all the women's ornaments as their spoil.

Meanwhile Osman Beg lay in his private chamber. He had sat in the audience hall as long as he could, but the strong European liqueur and its pleasant flavour had beguiled him, and at last he had rolled over in his seat insensible, and was carried by his slaves to his bed. Then it was that the music had ceased, the torches had been put out, and all, rolling themselves in their sheets, lay down where they were, like swathed corpses; and it was thus the Meer Sahib had found them. When the shot was fired from the high tower, the two servants who had remained by their master, conscious of some imminent alarm or danger, tried to arouse him, and even raised him up, but with a muttered curse he fell back again. In this condition—entering from the back passage—Burma Naik found him. As he entered the chamber, the Nawab's ser-

vants fled, and, conscious of a strange presence, Osman Beg tried to rise, but with a drunken hiccup fell back on his bed.

"It would be easy to end thy vile life, Osman Beg," said Burma to himself, "but I leave thee to the Lord. God forbid that my hand should slay one who cannot help himself. Look here, Sahib," he said, as the Governor entered the chamber; "there lies this disgrace to his faith and to his office; do as thou wilt with him, he is in thy hand."

"Let him lie, my friend, his fate is not in my hand; but he is helpless now. All I want are his papers, and the accounts and moneys of the fort; and these, especially the papers, must be found. Had he no servants?"

"My lord," said a man who emerged from a bathing room, "I am one; and if my life be spared will tell you all."

"Fear not," replied Burma Naik, "I know thee; and your new lord will not hurt any one who is faithful; but beware if thou attempt deceit."

"Well, then," replied the man, humbly, "the private papers are all in a leathern case on the floor under my master's head; he would allow them to be nowhere else. See, here it is;" and kneeling down, he drew a small leather travelling box from its hiding place. "The key of that box is round my master's neck, and the key of the treasury is tied to the string of his drawers; they can easily be removed; and the moonshee has the accounts.

I have charge of all his valuables, and can give an account of them, or show them if it is ordered."

"We will have an inventory made of them before your master, and they will be sent with him to Beejapoor when the King's order comes. Meanwhile they will be under attachment," said the Governor. "I will leave thee with thy master, and some men of mine to guard him when he wakes."

"We have done all we can do at present, Burma Naik," said the Governor; "even to getting the papers, which can be examined presently. Meanwhile the day is breaking, should not we give the signal?"

"Certainly, my lord; I will see to it immediately. One of the fort gunners ought to be without, and," continued Burma Naik, "I have sent word to the authorities of the fort, those who have to recognise all new governors, and they also will be here before sunrise, or soon after it. Meanwhile this hall may be swept out, for everyone has departed. Ho! without, bring the Furashes, and let them lay down the cloths for a durbar."

While this was being effected, the heavy gun on the highest bastion was fired with a tremendous report, which rattled from side to side of the ravine in a thousand echoes, and at last died out among the hills far away.

"You do not know where you are, my lord, as yet," said Burma Naik; "come and see;" and he took the Governor down the steps

of the verandah to another short flight that led to a small but elegant pavilion perched upon a rock, from whence the glen could be well seen in the daytime. Now, however, it seemed as though they looked into unfathomable darkness, and the effect was almost painful; but as the dawn rapidly advanced, the agitated river, the rocks, the rugged sides of the glen, and the cataract at its head, gradually grew into form, and the Governor stood gazing at them in a silence which partook of awe.

CHAPTER III.

ZUFFOORA-BEE COOKS THE GOVERNOR'S BREAKFAST.

OSMAN BEG'S cook, whom he had brought with him when he came, an old slave of his father's house, was a practical woman, well used to camp life, sudden alarms, and long marches, and in any emergency was ready to prepare food for considerable numbers. She and several helpers, boys and women, had betaken themselves to the shelter of the kitchen, which, being situated in a yard adjoining the "Palace," had beyond it another yard, where was a small dwelling house, in which, as her own peculiar property, the old lady lived. We call her lady, because she was invariably styled so by all. No one dared, except her master, call her Zuffoora, which, having been born on a Thursday, had been chosen as her name—but "Bee," as short for Beebee, or "Lady," was always added; and those who did not know her well, or were afraid of taking liberties with her, called her Beebee Zuffoora, which, no doubt, was most pleasing to her of all.

Zuffoora-bee had been seriously exercised in her mind the day before. Her master, in one of his wild fits, had, without any previous notice, taken into his head to invite all the dancing

girls who came to the Saint's festival, with their musicians and attendants, to dinner that evening; after which the women were to sing all night, relieving each other. Now the dancing and singing did not concern the old dame at all, but the dinner did, for her master had sent word by Johur that some of the dishes were to be of her very best style of cooking, for himself and the chief singers; and for the rest, pilao and hot kabobs would suffice.

To do her justice, Zuffoora-bee had done her best. Sundry dishes that we could name were delicate and delicious, whether fish, flesh, or fowl; and her master had sent her a present of two rupees as a token of his satisfaction, an unusual occurrence, which Johur explained by several of the dancing women having declared they had never tasted such food before, and insisting that Osman Beg should then and there send his cook a liberal present, on their behalf, which was accordingly done. I say, then, if this had been all, Zuffoora-bee would have been highly delighted, and might even have invited one or two of the girls to come and eat pán with her in her own house.

But the proceedings of the evening had disgusted her. She was very strict in the observances of her faith, also regular in the performance of stated prayers five times a-day. And no Moolla could have possessed a more perfect knowledge of the details to be observed at festivals, the ablutions and purifica-

tions of women at such seasons, and also of the needful fasts; or, on the other hand, the cooking necessary on such occasions. As to strong liquors or palm wine, she held them in the utmost abhorrence, and would as soon have cooked and eaten a piece of the abhorred animal as taken a drop of spirit into her mouth.

Her person was always scrupulously clean and neat; her almost white hair braided so that not a straggling lock appeared, and the rest neatly tied up in a simple knot behind her head. She had two satin petticoats for grand occasions, one green, the Prophet's colour, the other red, and both were striped with white. But for every day wear she used petticoats of soosi, a common kind of cotton cloth, which was made everywhere by village weavers, and could be bought in any village fair or market. This stuff was very neat and durable, and was worn, in various colours and degrees of fineness, by all Mussulman women of the lower classes. Zuffoora-bee was rich in possessing four of these petticoats, three of which were always put by nicely washed and ironed.

On the upper portion of her person she wore, first, a boddice, and over that a shirt of stout muslin, which descended a little below her waist, covering the band of her petticoat; and over all a doputta, or scarf, of tolerably fine muslin, which, tucked in at her waist, was passed round her head, falling gracefully over her back and hanging down over her right arm.

Zuffoora was a widow, and therefore wore few ornaments; and what she did wear were chiefly of silver, such as bracelets for her wrists, a silver ring round her neck, and silver rings on some of her fingers and her toes. She had also one very precious massive silver ring, which she wore over her right ankle. This had been given her by the King Ali Adil Shah of blessed memory, when, on one occasion, she had cooked a delicious meal for him after a battle, when his own servants had lost their way. The old lady was always eloquent on the subject of this ring of honour as she called it. "To men," she said, "the King gave estates, and lands, and jewels, and why should he not give them to good cooks? because if there were nothing to eat, who could fight? and there was nothing so valour-sustaining as a good pilao and well-spiced kabob."

The proceedings and mode of life and temper of her master had long been distressing to Zuffoora-bee; and if, by any possibility, she could have escaped from him and returned to Beejapoor, she would have done so; but she felt she was virtually a prisoner. When Abbas Khan had arrived sick and wounded, she had not only nursed him through his illness, but cooked the most delicate and nutritious food for him; and when the young man was about to depart, she begged permission to return to the great city and the old family house; but her master was cruel to her, abused her in vile language, and called her slave, and had told Johur to beat

her with a shoe. Johur dared not do that, and besides loved and respected the good dame; but one of the vile eunuchs had done it, and the insult had rankled deep in Zuffoora's heart, as an act which years of protection could not atone for.

We have not mentioned Zuffoora-bee sooner in this history, because when Abbas Khan came to the fort she was incessantly occupied by his needs. She had a perfect knowledge of his family, and respected it, and most particularly his aunt, the Lady Fatima, so that she did not go to the old Syud's house as usual; indeed, perhaps had some misgiving in her mind as to the presence of Christians there; but, like all others, she had a great reverence for the old Dervish, and especial love for little Zóra, to whom she had taught numbers of savoury dishes, such as it delighted the old man to eat, and which could be made out of very simple materials.

When the two women we know of came from Moodgul, she did not like them. She thought Máma Luteefa had more the air of a common procuress than of a decent God-fearing agent for matrimonial arrangements. Her clothes were too gaudy, her look too bold, her conversation too free. She never said her prayers, not even once a-day. She ate too much pán; the bells on her anklets were too loud, even louder than those of a dancing-girl; in short, she was offensive to her in many ways; and finding Zuffoora-bee independent, and by no means inclined to be dictated to or to be

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schooled in the manner of cooking her dishes, sent her orders to the women under the cook, and was gratified in having garlic and red-pepper enough in her kabobs to suit a labouring woman; and Zuffoora-bee was obliged to complain to her master that the marriage agent was insolent and overbearing But when poor little Zóra was brought up to the palace by force, the grief and indignation of the worthy dame knew no bounds. Her master was well aware what she would think of the act, and set eunuchs and some of his garrison to guard the kitchen and Zuffoora's house, and not allow her egress, lest she should come and upbraid him—for we take upon ourselves to say that Zuffoora-bee's remonstrance would have been neither weak nor timid, but, on the contrary, unflinchingly bold and defiant.

During the whole of the day Zóra had been confined to the palace Zuffoora-bee had prayed and wept by turns, but that she knew was useless; but, when the pán-seller's wife came to her in the evening, she gave Zuffoora-bee a hint, though others were by, that Zóra was not without friends; and when the alarm that she had escaped was given, Zuffoora fell on her knees and thanked God that it had been so, and that her master's wicked designs had been foiled. She was not afraid of him. He loved her good food too much to deprive himself of it, either by putting her in confinement or sending her away.

In either case, who would supply her place? But she had

not spared him; she had appealed to his honour, to that of his noble father, entreating him to reform his evil ways, and to abandon the vicious courses into which he had fallen. She who had nursed him as a child, who had attended on his mother, to see her son degenerating into a drunken profligate! "Better he were dead, far better that he were dead," murmured the good old dame. "I could say the last salutation to the dead as they covered up his body, and wish the peace of God to attend him, rather than I could join in the adulation which these miserable men and women pay to him. Touba! Touba! for shame, for shame!"

When the party under the new Governor and Burma Naik, with the Jemadar of the fort, was passing the wall which bounded her own court, she was already awake, preparing to rise and perform her ablutions previous to the early morning prayer, and the shuffling tramp of the men sounded ominous to her. What can it all mean she thought! Then the shot from above followed, but there was no response, and in a few moments more the shrieks of the dancing-women came loud and fast. She was not afraid, and got up, went through the high-arched kitchen to the door, unbarred it, and looked out into the yard, where several Beydurs whom she knew, and Mussulmans of the Governor, were standing, the latter of whom saluted her civilly as she asked them what had happened.

"Nothing," said one of the men in reply; "nothing, but that

the new Governor is come, and we have a new master. The new Nawab came from Beejapoor, and has taken possession, and the old Nawab is a prisoner—that's all."

"And who is the new Nawab?"

"Nay, mother, we know not yet, for we have not seen him. But they say he is a God-fearing man; and so he appears to be, for when the Azân was proclaimed, he spread his waistband, and knelt down and said his prayers in the little pavilion on the rock before the palace. And his men love him, and declare he is a true, kind man and a brave soldier, and that is the reason he was sent here."

"It is a lonely place to come to," returned the old dame; "but he is married, perhaps?"

"Oh, yes, mother! and has two children; and he will send for them by-and-by."

"From Beejapoor?"

"No, mother, from Juldroog, where he has been serving."

"I know it well, friend. My lord, that is his father"—and she pointed with her thumb to the palace—"commanded the troops there, and I was with him and the Begum Sahiba. Ah! times are changed since then. Well, such is the will of God. And Osman Beg?"

"He was found asleep, mother, and they did not harm him."

"Asleep! Not drunk, I hope?"

"I fear he was, mother; quite without sense."

"Fie upon him! fie! How can he waken and show his face to pious men? It were better that he died; but he must fulfil his destiny, good or evil as it may be. I must, however, see to breakfast for the new lord and his people. Some things are left from last night; they will do for his men, but he shall have everything fresh, and as good, too, as Zuffoora can make it."

The old dame had gathered all the information she needed, and now retired to her own private room, where she dressed herself in an entirely choice suit of clothes, braided her hair, and put on her small stock of ornaments; and, thus prepared, crossed the court, and entered the women's apartments of the palace. They were quite empty, but littered with faded garlands of flowers, broken pán leaves, and jars which had held palm wine, the stale smell of which was very offensive. Then she rolled up the curtains of one or two of the open arches to let in the wind, and called to the eunuchs to come to her. No one, however, replied, and she went on through the passage. The door of Osman Beg's chamber was open, and she looked in. He was still on his bed, snoring loudly, and two strange men were guarding him, and his two personal attendants were by him. They had thrown a warm coverlet over him, but she could see his face, which was flushed and bloated, and in Zuffoora's sight he was disgusting.

"Come to me, Boodun," she said to one of the servants,

"when he wakes, and I will send him some kicheri." Then she peeped into the hall of audience, which was a busy scene; and as it was quite light, though the sun had not risen, she could see everything. The new Governor was sitting in Osman Beg's seat, and the Moolla, the physician of the fort, the old Jemadar of the garrison, and some of the inferior officers, were sitting near him in their usual places. Others were coming in and presenting their nuzzurs, or offerings; some seating themselves, and others, retiring after having made their reverence, went out. There were two moonshees present looking over papers, of which one recorded the dates and addresses, and the other read them out to him; and beside these, there were the agents of the Zemindars who chanced to be in the fort, the Hindoo Patell and Patwari, and many others; so that the hall presented a busy aspect. Zuffoora-bee did not very well know what to do. Who was to tell the new Nawab that the cook was there, asking for orders; and the question would sound so odd amidst all the grave business going on, that she hesitated, but not for long. She was no coward, and she would at least show that she had the means of sending him food of which he must be in need, of ordering him a bath, and generally providing for his comfort. She therefore slipped forward confidently, yet modestly, and watched her opportunity till the Governor should look up, for he was reading a Persian letter, with a shade of anxiety upon his handsome face.

"Who art thou?" he said, with a pleasant smile, when he put the paper down, and looking up saw a neat, respectable-looking woman saluting him with due reverence. "Who art thou? Thou art not such an one as I looked to find here!"

"Your slave, Zuffoora-bee, is the cook, my lord, and offers her services. My lord must be hungry, and she wishes to know what he prefers, what his usual dishes are, and she will do her best to please him."

"Thou art thoughtful and kind, Zuffoora-bee," he replied. "Any other woman would have run away, but thou art here and doing thy duty. Why dost thou trust me?"

"I can trust one who is kind and gentle, as I hear my lord is. I can trust one who greets a poor slave with a smile instead of a curse, and who accepts her homage instead of having her pushed out of the durbar."

"You are a flatterer, Zuffoora-bee," said the Governor, laughing; "but go now, we are busy; send me anything you like; I am a plain soldier, and can eat anything God sends me; and if you will show my people where I can bathe now and sleep to-night, I shall be thankful. When my food is ready, you can send it."

"I will bring it myself, my lord, and see to the chamber and bath for you directly, for you must bathe ere you can eat comfortably," and making another respectful salutation, Zuffoora-bee walked proudly out. Inshalla! she, at least, had done her duty, and had

been kindly treated, and now she would have her proper place in the new household, for she held her allegiance to the fallen Osman Beg to be already dissolved.

The Furashes, who had been witnesses of her reception, were again her obsequious servants; the women's chambers were washed out and purified by pastiles; one of the spare beds was set out, carpets were spread, and the bath prepared; and when the Governor had bathed, put on clean light clothes, and sat down on the soft cushions prepared for him, he felt invigorated and refreshed; while in regard to his assumption of his charge of the fort and its dependencies, there was nothing to be desired: all had been perfectly successful and satisfactory.

Then when Zuffoora-bee brought what she had prepared with her own skilful hands, some delicate kicheri, fresh fish from the river, some savoury kabobs, and an omelette, and spreading a neat dusturkhan, or dining-cloth, set the viands before him, and encouraged him to eat, he felt as though his lines had fallen in pleasant places, and that even among those rugged rocks he could be perfectly happy. He might, too, hear something of the old physician and his granddaughter, whom he had been directed to trace if possible, and in regard to whom his first report to the Queen must contain intelligence. Whether, however, he could obtain any from Zuffoora-bee or not was doubtful; and if it were given, it might not be true. Women of her standing were but too often ministers to

their master's worst vices; and though the Moollas and all respectable persons in the morning durbar gave Zuffoora-bee the highest character, yet who could speak to her inner life? There was, however, no time to be lost; and after the excellent breakfast had been fully extolled, the Governor opened at once the subject of Zóra and her grandfather.

Now, if there had been one subject more than another on which Zuffoora-bee desired to open her heart fully to one in power, it was that of poor little Zóra and the old man, her grandfather; and if her account were prolix, it was interesting to her hearer, and the details were given with tears and sobs which attested their sincerity and truth. Yes, often and often Osman Beg had endeavoured to persuade her to entice the girl to the palace, and become the means of her forced marriage and ruin; but since the old Dervish had—in consequence of his great astrological science and Osman Beg's character—declined to receive him as a husband for the girl, and as Zóra herself feared and detested him, nothing was done till the women came from Moodgul, and Johur and Yacoot carried her up to the palace.

"Then," continued the old dame, "the Nawab confined me to my own apartments, and the entrance to the kitchen was guarded. Zóra and the two women lay in this room, and I was near. Oh! to hear her! Yet what could I do? If she had even sent me a message, I might have helped; and perhaps she did, for I heard

the pán-seller's wife insisting on being allowed to pass to me, but she was turned out. I warrant, however, that she it was who sent word to Runga Naik, and then at night Zóra fled with them. At least some say so, though others believe she fell into one of the deep holes between the rocks, and will never appear till the Day of Judgment. But I think she fled; and I, old as I am, would travel to Delhi if I thought there was any chance of finding her."

"Yes, she fled, Beebee," said the Nawab, with a sigh; "but she cannot be traced now. Runga Naik has been absent. Burma Naik, who has also been absent, did not find her on his return; and now no one knows where she is gone."

"Send me, my lord; send me; I will find her wherever she may be hidden away. God knows," she continued, sobbing, "she was so beautiful and so helpless that anyone might have seized her; and as to the old man, he is not only blind but hopelessly simple, and yet very obstinate. Ah, my lord! the more I think the more I fear."

"And was Zóra so beautiful?"

"I never saw anyone like her," returned the dame. "I don't know what it was, but there was a sort of witchery about her ever since she was much younger than she is now, which no one could resist; and Osman Beg always said she was his fate, and he would have her even if he went to hell after her, for that was the wild way in which he talked to me."

"And she escaped free and unhurt, and with her honour?"

"She did, my lord. Osman Beg made a wild attempt to marry her the night Johur brought her up, but the Moolla protested against it; and though the buffoon Pundree, who is a Hindoo, my lord, made some pretence to be a Moolla, and to say the blessing, it was of no use, and Osman Beg waited till he could get the Kazee from Nalutwar. But send for Johur, if he likes he will tell you the truth; but you might cut him to pieces before he would say a word if he did not please."

"I will examine him before you, Zuffoora-bee;" and, calling to an attendant, he bid Johur, the Abyssinian, be brought in.

The slave's arms had been tied behind his back, because he had made some resistance, and bound so tightly, that he was in pain; and he piteously besought relief by loosening of the bonds. Two of the eunuchs who had charge of him, on being directed to do so, at once loosed the rope; and the Governor could see the tears spring to the slave's eyes as he knelt down, rubbed his forehead in the earth, and rising, stood before him, with his chest heaving and his cheeks wet.

"Why are you kind to me, my lord? Do I not deserve death? Bid some of thy people behead me, then I shall not see Zóra as I do now."

"It is of her we would speak to thee, Johur; fear not, and tell the truth."

"My lord," he replied, "your slave will tell everything truly. Often had I been asked to entrap the child, often to bring her here, but I would not. I was flogged for that, but never mind, I could bear it; see, here are the marks of the whip. Then Jooma was ordered to go; and he, too, refused, and was instantly beheaded before Osman Beg himself; and I can show you the hole between the rocks where his bones lie, where the stain of his blood is upon the rocks; even the rains have not washed it away, nor the sun bleached it. Then, again, when the two women came from Moodgul, he sent for me, and said, 'Go and bring Zóra; if not, yours will be Jóoma's fate before nightfall.' I was a coward, my lord; I ought to have slain him; but I trembled and I went; and Yacoot and I brought Zóra and put her here, with the two women. But I watched. If he had attempted violence I would have slain him, for I never quitted his side. When the Moolla refused to marry him, my dagger was loose in its sheath. I watched him all that day, without taking food. I lay down at the head of his bed at night, only when all were asleep stealing out into the court here to see if the child slept. I was here when the owls hooted, and I watched her steal out silently, step over the eunuchs, cross the court, and pass on through the broken wall. I saw her last when she paused once on the top of the gap, and looked around her, and the moonbeams rested on her sweet face, and it shone like that of an angel. Oh,

my lord, I am only a poor Abyssinian, and have no proper speech to tell thee all; but that is the truth, and I would have followed her then, only that one owl hooted again, and I knew she had friends to help her, and was safe. Harm! no harm came to her, my lord. Osman Beg was afraid of what the Moollas, the old jemadars of the fort, and the worthy men who sate in the hall said to him; and he knew there would be a mutiny if he dared to dishonour the girl. Indeed, had she not escaped, there would have been one when the second attempt at marriage was tried. And now, my lord, bid them give me water, for my throat is dry; and do not have me bound, for I can be true to thee, my lord, and can help thee to find Zóra, my pearl, my lily, my Peri. Oh, my lord! how I love her! I, the poor slave, and would give my life for her. Will you not answer for me, Máma Zuffoora?"

"I will," said the old dame, earnestly. "Let my lord send us both to find the child and the old man, and we will go. Inshalla! we will bring them back, and the old house shall be desolate no longer."

"I will think about it, Zuffoora-bee; and when all means here are exhausted, I will send ye on their track, well believing your faith and love for the child. But, hark! they are calling me into the audience, and I must go. Come with me, Johur, and I will make thee over to my people."

As the Governor entered the hall, he saw that a violent struggle was going on. Osman Beg had awakened from his drunken sleep with confused intellects, and seeing strange faces beside his bed and none of his own attendants, had risen, suddenly pushed away his guards, and rushed, half naked as he was, towards his usual seat in the hall; but he was held fast by many of the new and old garrison, and the new Governor advancing, bade him sternly return to his apartment. Osman Beg, who was a very powerful man, still resisted violently, and could he but have possessed himself of any weapon, would have done serious injury. It was in vain that the new Governor explained who he was, and even showed him the Queen's warrant. Osman Beg was in no humour to hear or to understand, and the struggle was renewed. After several warnings, therefore, and being obliged to listen to all the vile abuse poured out against him, to being called a coward, and a Kafir, a traitor, and a slave, the Governor directed the attendants to tie Osman Beg's arms behind him easily with a soft turban, and to take him back to the room whence he had come. It was the act of being tied, perhaps, which first really awakened him to a clear sense of his position, and after a time he began to weep. No one came to him, none of his slaves or servants, and he was parched with thirst, with a craving for food. Now, therefore, the services of Zuffoora-bee were called into requisition; she

had food and some cool sherbet ready for him, and when he became more reasonable the Governor went to him. They had been old acquaintances, and knew each other perfectly well; and Osman Beg, promising to be quiet, was relieved from his bonds, which had only been loosened when he ate.

"So long as it is not my virtuous cousin, Abbas Khan, who has been sent to relieve me, I do not care," he said. "The Queen has a right to appoint whom she will, and to recall whom she will, and you, sir, are welcome, though you have come in a rough fashion. I think you will find all the records correct, and I now give you the key of the treasury;" and he felt in his waistband for it, but neither was it there nor that of his private papers, and his countenance fell.

"I have possession of all your private papers also, my lord," said the Governor. "It was for them that the surprise was made, and I already see that they are important. Nay," he continued, "may even imperil your life, my lord, and tally sadly with those which were read before the Queen in council the night that Abbas Khan slew Yacoot, the champion of Elias Khan, in the combat of ordeal. Hyat Khan, the Kotwal, found them, and I was present at their examination."

"When did this happen?" asked Osman Beg.

"Three days ago, my lord; I was present on duty at the

palace that night, and I left the city before daylight next morning."

"Then give me my papers, Meer Sahib, and let me depart to justify myself, and seek my wife, whom Abbas Khan has spirited away."

"Your wife, my lord; who is she?"

"She is Zóra," he replied, "who lived here. Oh, Zóra!" he cried in bitter pain, "this comes of thy sorcery. Let me go, sir!" he shouted fiercely. "Let me go! by what right do you detain me?"

"By this, the Queen's warrant," replied the Governor, "which my secretary will read to you. You will see that your person is to be kept securely; your papers sealed up and sent to Court, where you will be summoned when the King's pleasure is known. I am not in the habit of exceeding my orders, or of using hardly men of rank superior to my own. Your papers are even now being fastened up, and two of my own men, with a party of the garrison and some Beydurs, will escort them to the city."

From that time Osman Beg gave up hope, and fell back on his bed with a groan, covering his face. Had he possessed a dagger he might, perhaps, in his despair have stabbed himself; but as the first excitement was blunted, he grew sullen, would speak to no one, and refused for several days the food which Zuffoora brought herself, and vainly tried to persuade him to eat.

Meanwhile, Zuffoora and Johur were impatient to be gone. Johur had discovered that Zóra and the old man had left Korikul, and Burma Naik had even traced them beyond Kukéra, on the way to Sugger. It was most likely that they were there; and the old dame, provided with a comfortable litter, a strong pony for an attendant, and her little baggage, and Johur, and ten stout fellows of the garrison, were despatched one day to their great joy with the almost certainty of recovering the child and her grandfather. They followed them easily for several days by slow marches. They heard of them at the shrine of Sofee Surmurt at Sugger, but beyond that there was no trace. A worthy weaver's wife told Zuffoora that a good matron of Gulburgah, when on her pilgrimage to the shrine, had taken charge of Zóra and her grandfather; but as she belonged to a city beyond Gulburgah, who could tell where she might be? And thus it was that Zuffoora-bee and the Abyssinian returned to Juldroog weary and disappointed.

Had Abbas Khan spirited away the girl on any pretence? The Governor could not believe what Osman Beg repeatedly asserted; but still it might be so, and he doubted. Otherwise the affairs of the fort went on regularly and comfortably. The Governor received deputations from the Nawab of Moodgul and the Beydur Naik of Wakin Kéra, and all respectable neighbours round; but the only thing in which he had failed was not being able to trace Zóra. We, however, who have much interest in the child and her old grandfather must endeavour to do so.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW HOME.

I NEED hardly take the reader back to the day when, rescued from Osman Beg's vile designs, Zóra and her grandfather abandoned their peaceful home. All the incidents relating to that event will, I think, not have been forgotten, and need not be recalled. It was a piteous sacrifice, but it was well for the girl that it had been, as it were, forced on her grandfather and herself, and that no compromise was made with, or trust reposed in, the unscrupulous tyrant of the fort.

I say it was well that they had abandoned all, and fled. They were indeed passive instruments in the hands of a more experienced and powerful person who long before had taken a just measure of the Nawab's violent and treacherous character, and most especially dreaded his designs against the orphan girl who, as all knew, had no friends among her own people, except the poor inhabitants of the village in which she had lived all her life, and they were helpless to protect her. The result justified Runga Naik's extreme measure. No sooner was the escape of Zóra known to the two women who had charge of her, than their shrill

cries aroused the eunuchs, who were supposed to be keeping watch outside, and instant search was made for her among the rocks in the vicinity of the palace, but in vain. They then in turn raised an alarm, and Osman Beg himself, it being now daylight, was roused by his attendant, and a new search was begun, which, as we know, ended in disappointment. The two eunuchs who had already been pinioned, and were expecting no less punishment than death, were put into heavy chains, and flogged till they could bear no more, and thrust into a dungeon. There one of them had died of his wounds and of neglect; the other, worn to a skeleton, being released by the new Governor as soon as his place of confinement and condition were known.

After the two eunuchs had been disposed of, Osman Beg, attended by his Abyssinian slaves and some of his retainers, descended from the palace to the village, where every one with whom Zóra or her grandfather was known to have associated was flogged, or otherwise tortured, to disclose the place of their concealment. The old house was ransacked in vain, and every hiding place among the rocks that was in any way accessible searched for the fugitives. It was soon known, however, that they had crossed the river, and that Runga Naik and Burma had carried them off; and the Nawab would willingly have seized the Beydurs of the fort if he had dared; but they set him at defiance, and he was too weak to attempt inter-

ference with more than a hundred stout, well-armed men. Nor, indeed, was the proper garrison of the fort in at all a placable mood. They were, for the most part, Mussulmans, and were disciples of the old Syud, and had Osman Beg meddled with them in any way, he might not have escaped with his life; and he wisely retired to the palace, while Zóra's friends contented themselves with drawing up an account of the whole transaction, and transmitting it to Beejapoor, but not at once; for in Indian subjects of this kind there are always discussions as to the expediency or otherwise of complaint.

If successful, remedy is obtained; if otherwise, the complainants fall into an infinitely worse plight than before. In this case the formal petition of the garrison, the village people, the Moollas of the mosque, the acting Kazee, and all other respectable persons, had reached Beejapoor the day after the new Governor had left; and the Queen Chand Beebee, already in possession of the facts, had given a very gracious reply to the petitioners, promising them justice as soon as the officer whom the Government had despatched should make his report.

From all this it may be inferred that had poor Zóra and her helpless grandfather not been taken away, very serious consequences might have ensued. If there had been an attempt to conceal the girl in the island, and she had been discovered, there can be no doubt that the last indignity would have been inflicted

upon her. If, again, she had been openly protected by the garrison, much bloodshed might have taken place; and though Runga was sure of his own Beydurs, he was by no means so sure of the Mussulman portion of the garrison who might adhere to their Governor.

For himself and Burma he was quite regardless of consequences. He was too strong at Korikul and Kukeyra, as well as in every village of the frontier, to be meddled with. He had no fear of Beejapoor, to which he was rendering important services every day; and he knew that Osman Beg dare not complain against him, because of the forcible abduction of a holy Syud's granddaughter, and the connection with Eyn-ool-Moolk's conspiracy, the threads of which Runga held in his hands. Osman Beg, though he would have given all he possessed to be revenged upon Runga Naik, knew him to be beyond his reach; and perhaps the most unbearable indignity he suffered on his deposition from power, was the hearing from Burma's own lips in the public cucherry the story of the rescue of Zóra, and the means by which it had been accomplished, which was corroborated in every point, and which, delivered with infinite zest and humour, caused roars of laughter.

There was, however, one point on which Osman Beg seemed to be inflexible. He declared that though the Moolla and Kazee of the fort had refused their offices in regard to Zóra's marriage to him

—and those present on the occasion gave equally clear and convincing testimony as to the non-performance of the ceremony, and the indignity put upon all by being asked to partake in such a mockery—in spite of all this, Osman Beg steadily persisted in asserting that Zóra was his wedded wife; that he had had means in private of having the ceremony performed, to which Zóra had consented; and that wherever, and howsoever, he might meet her or find her, he would claim her as his wife before the King, the Queen, and all the ecclesiastical or other courts of law in Beejapoor.

The Governor could not account for this, and he could not obtain the evidence of the two women from Moodgul. Osman Beg, in his blind fury, had, without reflection, had the hair of both cut off, their faces blackened, and mounted them barebacked upon asses; they, with the money he had given them, which he was too proud to take back, were sent across the river towards Moodgul. There they had complained to the Nawab, who declined to interfere; and all that was known of Máma Luteefa and her confidential servant was, that they had gone to Golconda, to pursue their avocations in a place where they were unknown, or at least were not remembered. It is possible, I think, if Osman Beg had retained them in his service, or had not ill-treated them, he might have instructed them how to support his unvarying assertion that Zóra was his wife, though she had escaped from him, as he believed, to join

his cousin Abbas Khan, with whom she had had communication while he was confined to the fort by his wound. Day after day did the Governor return to the case, and had gradually accumulated all the evidence procurable, which was attested by the Moollas, Khadims of the mosque, and Sheykh Baban, the Jemadar, all of whom expressed not only their willingness, but their desire, to be sent to Beejapoor should the case go to trial in the head Mufti's court. Of this, however, there will be more to say hereafter; and in this seeming divergence our only wish is that the reader should lose no point of importance in the thread of this history.

On the night, or rather the morning, of Zóra's escape, she and her grandfather had been taken from the bank of the river direct first to Jumalpoor, and afterwards to Korikul. The old Dervish had been a passive instrument in Runga's hands. He had heard with the utmost terror of Zóra's abduction; he had cried to the Lord in an almost perpetual moan for the child's protection, and he had wandered from the house to the mosque to pray, and, finding no comfort, had returned to the house and moaned there. He had searched all the women's apartments, and called her name repeatedly, almost to the weariness of old Mamoolla, who had chidden him for not putting better faith in God and in the child's friends. Had not the pán-seller's wife twice come and declared that as yet the child was safe, and would be rescued before any harm could reach her. But all in vain. The old man

could not be brought to understand how the Nawab, with all the forces of the fort at his disposal, could be outwitted by at most two or three men; how his darling could be brought to him openly through the fort, even though it might be by secret paths. The poor old man's mind was a chaos of utter misery and despair, which found no rest or hope in any assurance. He suffered Runga's men to remove all his property, which they did carefully and honestly; and, as even Mamoolla said afterwards—for she, also, was too much excited in her mind to be capable of any thought—without losing an end of a thread or a bit of string. All the old Syud's books, his drugs, his medicines, his charms and amulets—in short, everything that he prized on earth—had been carried away.

And so it was with Zóra, her two cows and the goats, her books and simple clothes, and the strong box which contained some gold and ornaments which had belonged to her mother. And when they reached Korikul, which they did the next day, Runga Naik had all opened in her presence, and his Brahmin scribe made inventories of what belonged to both, as also did Zóra at the same time. So far, therefore, all was well; they had lost nothing, but the change was very sad and very hard to bear. From the first glance at her, the Lady Keysama had taken a prejudice against poor Zóra, who appeared to her like a young dancing girl; and although her clothes were poor, not to say mean,

and she had no ornaments, indeed, presented only the appearance of an ordinary Mussulman's daughter, yet, with all, there was a look of intelligence and of superiority in her glorious eyes, in the carriage of her head, and her figure in general, which at once separated her from anyone of inferior grade to herself.

The Lady Keysama did not like this. She even felt jealous of poor Zóra when she arrived and was led in by Runga Naik, preceded by two Beydur slave girls. Keysama had, indeed, risen to salute her, bade her be seated, asked a few questions, to which Zóra had replied timidly, for the fame of the lady's fiery temper was notorious through the country, and was not unknown to her, and almost immediately dismissed her with the gift of a new sari, a muslin scarf, and a piece of soosi cloth, with some pán, hoping that she would find comfortable lodgings and live happily. In truth, the dame had already entertained a violent jealousy against Zóra, and, in the course of a day or so, told her husband that she doubted the whole story of the abduction, and that it was evident he had brought her for his own purposes.

The Lady Keysama was not, ordinarily speaking, a jealous wife, but she was suspicious, and mistrustful of anything out of the ordinary course, such as the rescue of Zóra; and as she said to herself, if the Nawab had carried off any one from Korikul, would not her lord resent it; and what did it matter to Runga whether the Nawab married the pale-faced girl or not, it was no

business of his, and his bringing her to Korikul was, in her estimation, entirely unnecessary and unjustifiable. I do not mean to say that she openly accused her kind lord of infidelity to his face, or that he had to endure lectures upon the subject, but what has been recorded was in her thoughts; and it is not extraordinary, if the tempers of Eastern women be considered, that she set herself to watch, and that her ears were open to any reports and conjectures which her humble friends might bring to her.

Meanwhile for some days Zóra and her grandfather were very comfortably established by their friend in an empty house which had belonged to a weaver, who, for reasons of his own, had left the town and established himself at Sugger; and as the house he had lived in was the property of the lord of the town, it was now at Runga Naik's disposal. True, it was not so commodious as that at Juldroog, but it was more than sufficient for them. It was close to the mosque, and a door from a spacious yard behind opened into the ground which surrounded the mosque, part of which was a cemetery overshadowed by some fine trees. The Moolla lived hard by on the other side, and his wife was a kind, motherly woman, and paid them frequent visits. As usual with most mosques, there was a large colony of pigeons attached to it; there were parroquets and mynas, with other birds in the trees, so that Zóra and her grandfather were soon at their ease, and rested thankfully under the shelter of their protector's hospitality, and the

old man soon began to find his way to the mosque at prayer-time; and as Mussulman weavers are for the most part pious persons, there was always a good attendance, especially at afternoon prayer, when the day's work was done.

The fame of the sanctity of the aged recluse of Juldroog had for years past been spread throughout the country even to a distance; and though he had not assumed the title of saint, or made any pretensions to be one, yet had he died in Juldroog, there is little doubt he would have received all the honours of one after that event. Miracles would have been asserted as proceeding from the worship of his last resting-place, and there is no doubt it would have risen in popular esteem. Indeed, it was evident that, even in this strange place, the veneration for the old Syud was increasing.

As he sat daily in the mosque, and discoursed eloquently upon the sublime subject of "Turreequt," or path to Heaven, he charmed and delighted his hearers; and the rank of the old recluse as a Syud, his eloquence and kindly manner of teaching, had a wonderful effect on his audience, who had never listened to words like his before—unless, indeed, they went on some pilgrimage to any celebrated shrine, where holy and learned men assembled and instructed the people in sermons. Then the Syud's fame as a physician was perhaps among the lower orders even greater than that of his learning, and was not confined to Mus-

sulmans but extended to Hindoos, to whom, although they were unbelievers, he was as charitable and attentive as to his own people.

Thus between morning prayers and noon, and frequently afterwards, he was asked for advice; and he wrote charms, amulets, exorcisms, and the like, with the help of Zóra, who, except when he was expounding doctrines in the mosque, never left him. Every day at the hours of prayer, when the muezzin had cried the Azán, or invitation, Zóra used to lead him forth by the door in the yard-wall; and some considerate poor folk had made a smooth path from thence to the steps of the mosque, where there was always someone present to help him up; and Zóra would either return to old Mamoolla, or, folding her scarf over her face, say her prayers in some corner of the building where men did not look at her.

Runga Naik did not come to them very often, he had many things to look after—his people, and their caste, and other disputes, such as shares of land and produce—and for this purpose he sat daily on a chubootra, or platform of earth, which had been made hundreds of years before, around the trunk of a venerable neem-tree, and where his father and grandfather, and ancestors long ago, had sat before him. This, indeed, was his public court, open to all comers; and was simple and effective, because he was patient and listened to everyone, either giving a sum-

mary decision himself or referring cases to arbitration. It was a patriarchal mode of proceeding, which was the custom of his clan; and if there were no lawyers, no agents, no pleaders, nor indeed anyone but plaintiff and defendant and their witnesses, perhaps the justice meted out was none the less efficient, and, at all events, the people desired nothing more. Sometimes Runga was absent for a few days on business with his chief at Wakin-Keyra; sometimes he went with a large escort to collect his dues or blackmail in the district west of his own territory; and whenever he did go, he provided liberally for his guests during his absence, and they had rations of flour, pulse, ghee, and vegetables direct from the house, with which the Lady Keysama did not interfere. She only, and that perpetually, threw out hints to her husband that "that great girl Zóra ought to be married; that she was ashamed of seeing her come to the house (for Zóra did pay a visit sometimes to the Beydur lady, though her castle was an unclean place to her), and that he ought to insist upon her grandfather's settling her in life; and no doubt some worthy man might be found who would gladly marry one so learned and so beautiful."

But Runga Naik had no such intention. I think he remembered that first night at Juldroog, and that Abbas Khan desired no better blessing in life than to gain Zóra for his own. Before he attempted to bring that about, it was necessary to follow up the

scattered parties of Eyn-ool-Moolk's rebellion, especially the members of Abbas Khan's troop who had deserted him; and, as he thought, allowing ample time for his young friend to reach Beejapoor, he set out for the western districts in the direction of Belgaum; and yet at that very time, within a distance of thirty miles, Abbas Khan was lying in a small village grievously ill with the return of his fever and the reopening of his wound, of which the reader has already been informed. But so it is in life, when a blessing, above all things precious, lies at our very doors, we often fail to know of it, or even of its very existence. Runga had no time to lose, he thought, and his desire was to hasten to Beejapoor direct, should he have any success in his expedition. Should he have none, he could return and take on Zóra and her grandfather to Beejapoor, that the old man might lay his complaint of ill-usage before the Queen, or the King if he had returned. Runga had no idea of who the old Syud was—that was known only to Abbas Khan, whose intention was, as we know, to have him sent for; but the gracious message of the Queen had gone too late, and when all attempts to discover Zóra and the old man were fruitless.

Before he left Korikul, however, Runga Naik and his wife had come to extremities about poor little Zóra. We need not detail the gradual increase of acerbity and jealousy on the part of the Lady Keysama. Now he was going away (she put the matter in that light), who would be responsible for the girl? She herself—

and she put her hands to her ears, and called all the gods to witness—would not, and could not. She had enough to do in attending to her own poor folk, about whom she knew, or could find out everything, whereas about these strangers she knew nothing. He might be very fond of the girl, there was no doubt of that; but an unmarried girl of her age and appearance, with nobody near her but a feeble old servant—well, she would say nothing herself, but let him ask the neighbours, let him ask the Choudhree of the Momins, and hear what they said about Zóra, who, she thought, was only fit now to become a public dancing girl, and if she took to that profession she would be welcome. Had she not been heard singing words that no one understood to unknown tunes? Where did she learn them? As to the defamatory part of the Lady Keysama's tirade, we decline positively to enter into it. When a woman of the Lady Keysama's temper, whatever be her station in India, or whatever her caste or sect, condescends to be abusive, her words cannot be translated, or even paraphrased; and such was the excitement the lady worked herself up into, that Runga, who had never been subjected to the like before from his wife, got fairly alarmed. "They must go," he said; "but how to tell the old man and Zóra!"

Yet it must be done. With Zóra and his old friend he must part; but with his wife, the mother of his children, the admirable mistress of his house, the respected and beloved of all, he could

not part; and she had distinctly said that if the girl were not sent away, she herself would go to her father's house at Wakin-Keyra, and tell the story so that all should hear. Her father was the brother of the Rajah of the clan, whose enmity Runga Naik dare neither risk nor provoke; and he knew enough of his wife's determined spirit to believe she would do exactly as she threatened if he did not do as she requested. No; on those hard conditions he could not afford to protect Zóra; her grandfather, whom all, even his wife, loved and honoured, could not be separated from her, and, therefore, they must go.

So several days before the Brahmin astrologer had predicted one favourable for the departure of his little expedition, he went privately to the old man, knelt down reverently at the threshold of his door, and confided to him what has been recorded, and besought pardon for the apparent rudeness he was obliged to commit. The tender-minded fellow's heart, as he said, was broken by his wife, who, without cause, had put this shame on him privately, an was ready, to her own shame, to make it public. Now it was known to his friend only, and he might offer counsel in his extremity.

The old Syud was inexpressibly shocked and grieved. The very last thing he had thought possible had come to pass. Was, then, Zóra, his little Zóra, so much advanced in girlhood that it was immodest or dangerous to allow her to go about unveiled

and untended, as she had used to do? Was she, indeed, of marriageable age, and in permitting her to go abroad was there even a suspicion of immodesty? He could not see, and his experience of worldly matters had faded out. Still Runga Naik, and above all his wife, could not be mistaken. Else why should suspicion and jealousy have arisen? And now a horrible thought flashed into the old man's mind. Could Runga have carried off Zóra for his own purposes? It might be so; otherwise, why did his wife suspect him? "Ya, Alla Kureem, protect us!" he cried in his misery. "We are but two helpless creatures, a girl and a blind man, trying to serve Thee! Oh! suffer us not to fall into misery, which Thou alone canst avert!"

Zóra was visiting the family of the Choudbree, or head of the weavers, that day; and she was fond of doing so, as his wife was in reality kind and motherly, and much interested in her helpless condition. That day she and her children had insisted on bathing Zóra, dressing her hair, and putting on her a suit of new clothes, for which her husband and his men had woven the materials, and his wife had made them up. And when Zóra, duly dressed and anointed, was placed in the seat of honour, and the children were decking her with garlands of jessamine, and calling her bride, their mother said gravely to Zóra, "And it is time thou shouldst be so in reality, darling, to be able to live a decent, respectable life, and bear children. I was not thy age, Zóra, when I was

married; and what has thy grandfather been doing that he has not arranged this long ago? It is time thou, child, shouldst no longer have the mantle of reproach cast over thee."

"Of reproach, mother?" said Zóra, her lips quivering and tears starting from her eyes. "No one has ever reproached me; no one wants me; no one has ever asked me in marriage; and many have told me, that one of the noble Syud race would have honour in putting on the green dress, and renouncing the world, living a humble and devout life, doing good works. Oh, mother! speak no more to me about marriage, for I cannot bear it."

"Well," said the dame, "I will tell my husband what you say; but of late both he and I have been distressed by hearing things that ought not to be spoken."

"God help me!" said the girl, "for I trust in Him. I will speak to Abba when I go home, and pray him to take me away from this. No, mother, wherever we go we are Fakeers, and the world is open to us, and the ears of the Hearer of prayer are never shut. Yes, I see it all, mother, now, and we must go."

"And have you any means of support, my child?" asked the dame.

"Oh, yes," returned Zóra, "God feeds Fakeers as He feeds the ravens and the wild birds, who cannot work. True, I can embroider, and do many things for myself if there be need; but Abba can be rich if he pleases. The offerings he receives every day

amount to many, many rupees, and yet he refuses almost all; and those he keeps are only what I take up from his carpet, when people leave them. No, mother, there is no fear of want; only to beg for our daily bread is painful, and we take only what the merciful Alla sends us." The dame could say no more; and the children were awed into silence at seeing their mother and Zóra so grave; and though Zóra tried to be merry, and did what she could to amuse her little companions, even to singing Maria's songs, her heart was heavy and sad, and the children instinctively clung to her and tried to cheer her, when they saw the tears welling from her eyes and coursing each other down her cheek. Zóra did not rally, and went home.

Meanwhile, Mamoolla had come from the Bazar, and her master called her to him, and questioned her in regard to Zóra, and as to whether any remarks about the child had come to her ears. Of course they had. Who could keep a great girl like that in the house, and allow her to go about without restraint, and not hear reproach. At Juldroog everyone was accustomed to see Zóra abroad, but here, in a populous place like Korikul, it was quite another matter, and people would talk; who could stop their mouths? As to the child herself, there was not a suspicion of immodesty about her. She was as pure as an infant, but still that would not help her if the world were uncharitable.

Mamoolla was talking to her grandfather when Zóra returned,

escorted by two stout journeymen of the weaver's; and as she threw off the sheet that had covered her, she hastened to her grandfather, and laying her head in his lap, burst into tears.

"I know, I know, my darling," he said, putting his trembling hands upon her head, "thou, too, hast heard the foul reports, and may God forgive those who set them on foot. Ameen, and Ameen."

"Let us go, Abba," she cried, sobbing. "The world will not have us as we are, but the merciful Lord is our refuge. Let us go, Abba; whither He guides us we cannot fail or perish."

CHAPTER V.

AMONG FRIENDS.

THE next day being Friday, or the Sabbath, there was a larger attendance than usual in the mosque, for all God-fearing men, and some women with them, did no work, and attended the stated prayers. After the noontide devotions, there gathered round the old Syud a great number of people, and he thought it a good opportunity to take leave of them. Accordingly, after begging all to be seated, he addressed them much as follows :—

"You have been kind to me, friends," he said, in a voice much broken by emotion, "and, had it been the will of the Disposer of all events, I would have remained with you till I died. But man's will is not God's will, and my heart tells me, nay, whispers to me unceasingly, by the Lord's prompting, 'Thou hast not attained what is desirable and necessary for those who aspire to perfection in the holy calling of a true Syud. 'Thou callest thyself a Dervish, and some call thee Mushâekh, or holy one, but thou hast not attained even the rank of a Fakeer. Thou hast never been elected; thou, old as thou art, hast never chosen a leader in the way of heavenly life (Turreequt), and that above all things is needful for

thy acceptance before God. Thou hast led an easy life, never undergoing privation, and it is only in relation to thy charity and good works that thou hast been protected so far; and thy removal here was an act of divine mercy, and thy first step in the Turreequt, which thou must fulfil. Seek, therefore, some godly saint of great knowledge and experience in holy mysteries, and tarry not till thou hast found him.' 'Tarry not! tarry not,' my heart cries to me day and night. 'Thou art old and growing feeble, and if thou delayest, a blessed portion may not be thy lot. Death may claim thee, and after this warning what answer canst thou make to Moonkir and Nukeer, the angels of death, who will examine thee in the tomb? and how wilt thou be enabled to cross the bridge Al Sirat, sharper than a sword?' Therefore, O beloved friends and brothers, my soul trembles as it dwells on these divine truths. I cannot rest under them; I must seek rest; I must follow the path of eternal life which has been opened to me. I must not fear to meet the angels of death.

"I have been spared nearly eighty years, and have been idle and slothful. True, I can plead that I was a prisoner and had no free will of my own; but I am a prisoner no longer, and must go forth and speed on ere it be too late; and therefore I go as I am, guided by the Lord, and must not tarry, lest I be too late and fail."

Then the whole congregation burst into passionate weeping, and many cries arose of "Stay, stay with us, and fear not, for thou

art holy and aged, and the Lord will have mercy on thy infirmity! Thou art leading us as no one ever led us before. May the Lord reward thee!"

But the old recluse had prepared himself for all this. If it were necessary for him to leave the town on Zóra's account, and that seemed to him imperative, he had for some years past meditated the assumption of the order of a Fakeer leading to that of a Mushâekh. He had applied for permission to visit some holy shrine and make his public profession, but in vain; no one had had the authority in Juldroog to grant such permission to a State prisoner, even though his name and rank were unknown; and the Nawab Osman Beg's denial, on his application, had been peculiarly offensive and discourteous. Now, however, he was free; and, although that might have been matter of accident, the old man had come to the conclusion in his own mind that it had been appointed by the Lord, and he reproached himself bitterly that he had ever murmured against the seeming violence, and, indeed, dishonour, which he had had to undergo on his sweet child's account.

The people saw it was no use to urge the old man further. He had determined upon his own course, as most believed, by divine influence, and who dared to oppose that? He told them finally that his friend, Runga Naik, their lord, had provided him with a residence at the quiet village of Kukeyra, where he should rest for

a while in solitude, and that any of his friends who desired ghostly council, or medicine, or amulets could visit him there. Then he got up, and placing his hands upon the heads of the children who were brought to him, and on those who surrounded him, he departed amidst the prayers, blessings, and good wishes of all.

On his return home he found Runga and Burma without, sitting under the tree in the court-yard, who came forward and touched his feet with a lowly reverence.

"I have taken leave of them all," said the Syud, with emotion; "but it is well, it is as God wills, and whatever our destiny may be, it must be fulfilled. The Lord has vouchsafed to me a much clearer view of my duty than I had at Juldroog, and that, whatever betide, I must follow. My only anxiety is about Zóra; and I have no fear, for the Almighty will raise up friends to her; the orphan will not be deserted. To Abbas Khan I have confided who I am, which even you must not know yet; and, I think, he will help her, wherever she may be, when I have passed away."

They could only weep, for the old recluse was dear to them both, notwithstanding their difference of faith. And the old man continued—

"To you, Runga Naik, I commit what worldly property I possess, which is all in the box we have sealed up; and I pray you to keep it, to be reclaimed by Zóra if ever she is in a condition to

do so. Keep it in your own treasury. There is not much in it; some ornaments of her mother's, some gold that belonged to her, and such jewels as I was presented with when I was at the King's court in honour. If I die, my child's rank would be known by them. Now she shares my condition of a Fakeer, and we can live on the alms the faithful may bestow upon me. And you spoke of a temporary resting-place at Kukeyra, is it ready for us?"

"Burma has been arranging it, and it is now ready for you, Huzrut; but it is a poor place, only a thatched dwelling, in which an old Fakeer lived for many years, and died lately. It is in a little garden by itself, just outside the village gate; but my men there have orders to watch it day and night, and no harm can come to you. You will be nearly alone, for except the Moolla, who is very ignorant, there are but few Mussulmans, and they are only poor weavers and cultivators. Ha! who are these? Some visitors to ask your blessing, Huzrut; are they to be admitted? By the Gods! I see men from Juldroog, and one of the Nawab's slaves, what can it mean?"

"Has Zóra returned?" asked her grandfather. "Mamoolla, is the child there?"

"I am here, Abba," she replied, coming to the door of the house. "What need you?"

"Runga tells me that some persons have come from Juldroog, thou hadst better keep thyself close;" but, as he spoke, the women

entered by the outside door; and as she slunk back into a dim corner, she saw that the arrivals were Máma Luteefa and Shireen-bee, her servant, who saluted the old man with respect.

"We have a letter from the Nawab," said Máma Luteefa, "and he has sent us to deliver it and to plead for him."

"As-tagh-fur-oola! God forbid!" cried the Syud, putting his hands to his ears, "that any message should reach me from that bold, bad man. Leave me; I will not hear you."

"He is penitent now," returned the Máma, wiping her eyes. "He will do whatever you please."

"He is worn to a shadow," said Shireen-bee, sniffling and blowing her nose. "He will die of grief, Huzrut, for Zóra-bee. Will she not relent? Osman Beg will have the grandest marriage performed."

"Here," interrupted Máma Luteefa, "if Zóra wishes, in the midst of her friends. He will come without a following, and place himself—he—he—in voluntary captivity to the beauteous Zóra. He will settle on her a dower of fifty thousand rupees, and an elephant could not carry the clothes he has provided. If my lord will read his letter he will see that I tell the truth."

"Let Zóra open and read it," said the old man, gently. "She can choose for herself. I will say nothing, for rank and wealth may have favour in her sight, though they have none in mine. Zóra! Zóra!" and she came forth, veiling her face, and sat down beside him.

"Read this," he said; "it is from Osman Beg; and I would that these his emissaries heard thy decision from thine own lips. Open the letter and read it to me."

The epistle was from Osman Beg himself, whose orthography and spelling were none of the best. He had evidently not trusted his moonshee to copy it. It contained all that Máma Luteefa and Shireen had enumerated, and much more in a fulsome style of flattery; and he would come to Korikul, with his body servants only, to celebrate the marriage at any time, or by any person, that might be approved of.

It was as much as she could do to read the letter. Zóra's face flushed, and her eyes glowed at the remembrance of the insult and indignity which had been put upon her; and when she had read it and put it down, she burst into a violent flood of tears. "He might have spared thee this last indignity, Abba," she sobbed, "knowing, as he does, that we have been obliged to fly from his tyranny and become wanderers. And these women, who failed to persuade me once when I was in their power, might have guessed what the result of their mission would be when I was free. Yet you are not to blame, Máma Luteefa. You were following your trade, and he was giving you gold. He has even bribed you again. Enough that you think it honourable and good. Now hear the last words I will speak to either of you. Go! tell your master that I am now, even as I was then. No wealth can tempt me, no

threat can terrify me; I go whither he cannot find me, and am henceforth a Fakeer with my grandfather, whose lot I share, whatever it may be, till he passes away. Go! and trouble us no more."

"And that is your answer, Zóra-bee?" said Máma Luteefa, somewhat scornfully. "You refuse, child, all that I had contrived for you."

"I have spoken," returned the girl; and she sat still, idly picking up pebbles from the sand.

"And how didst thou cross the river, Mámajee?" asked Runga, in his rough Dekhan dialect.

"What business is that of yours?" said Shireen-bee. "My mistress does not speak with Beydurs."

"Perhaps she would speak; perhaps she would be made to speak if I had her head shaved and she were set on an ass. I am master here, and can do justice after my own rough fashion. Will ye answer the question?"

If it had not been painful to witness, the terror of the two women would have been ludicrous. They looked hither and thither without seeing the possibility of aid, and at last fell down before the old Syud in an agony of alarm. "Mercy! mercy!" they cried frantically. "Spare us; we are only poor women earning our bread. There in the fort he threatened us; here we are also terrified. Mercy! mercy! let us go, and we will hasten away."

"Ye have not answered my question, Mámajee," rejoined Runga. "How did ye cross the river?"

"The Nawab sent us by the lower ferry, and we said we were on a pilgrimage from Moodgul. We went round a long way before we could reach the place. They would not let us cross from the fort."

"Good," said Runga, with a smile of content. "Then our people are not to be tempted; and we must secure the boats below, Burma. As ye did not come by the upper ferry, ye shall return by it," he continued to the women; "and when ye get back offer fatehas that your hair is on your head. Take them, Burma, and despatch them by Jumálpoor; and if ever I see you again here, or hear of any of the Nawab's people being on this side the river again, I will have their ears cut off and tied about their necks."

"And there is no answer to our master's letter?" said Shireen, somewhat impudently. "And what shall I say to him from thee, my fairy?"

"Begone!" shouted Runga. "Up, and begone! Else beware! I am not used to have my will disputed;" and seizing them by the shoulders, he pushed them out of the door into the street; and in a few minutes more, with fresh bearers for Máma Luteefa's litter, they had passed the gates under an escort of Beydurs, and were on their way. We need not detail their recep-

tion in the fort; suffice it to say that two days after Osman Beg directed their hair to be shorn, and, riding on asses, as we have already mentioned, they were expelled the fort.

"Shookr! Shookr! Thanks, a thousand times, that they are gone. Runga, I owe this to thee; else they had persecuted me, and Zóra, too, poor child. Do not weep; you are safe now. Blessed be the Lord! Safe from persecution! Hast thou the letter, Zóra?"

"It is here, Abba. What shall I do with it?"

"Keep it for me," he replied; "I would fain have it shown to Abbas Khan. Wilt thou take it, Runga?"

"Nay," he replied, "I should but lose it; let Zóra keep it safely. And now, Huzrut, be led by my advice. Meeah must have reached Beejapoor before this, and some of my people are going for their yearly State services. As I have told thee, I am obliged to go westwards; but they will escort thee safely, and make ye both over to Meeah if he be there; and if not, get ye a lodging near the Chishtee Saint, in the quarter of the Dervishes."

The old Syud shook his head. "No," he said; "the path of my salvation lies to the east, and the Murdan-ool-Ghyb points thither on Monday, when we must depart. I cannot, under the revelations made to me, change my direction or my purpose; and after what has happened to-day, I feel as if there were additional pressure put upon me to depart speedily."

"As you will, Huzrut, as you will," said Runga, kindly; "only I wish it were otherwise. I wish you would go direct to Beejapoor, and sit down at the palace gate till you are recognised and relieved. This travelling is a sore trial both to you and the child: and who have you to help you?"

"Do not care for me, Abba," said Zóra, with a sweet smile. "Now they are gone I have no fear—none. And you know we shall have Ahmed with us, Runga Naik; he refuses to leave us, and says he will become a Fakeer with Abba. So we shall not be alone. And perhaps I shall become one also, if Mamoolla does; but I have not felt the call yet, and shall wait awhile."

"Take my advice, my child," said Runga. "If I am not wrong, and my Brahmin astrologer is not wrong, there are better things in store for thee than the skirt of a Fakeer, even if there be some pain in attaining them; and Vishnu Punt is a strangely wise man, who can tell everything. Shall I bring him to thee?"

"No," she said, quietly. "That might not be lawful for me. Nothing can possibly turn Abba from his purpose, and I should only be perplexed and terrified if your Brahmin's directions were different from his. No; let me be. I do but follow my fate, Runga Naik; and be the way rough or smooth, it must be travelled in faith and trust."

No more remained to be done. All Saturday and Sunday there were other sad services in the mosque, and during both days

visitors were constant, begging for charms, amulets, and medicines; and by many small gifts of money, vermicelli and other simple necessaries were provided. Finally, early on Monday they left Korikul, soon after daylight, after partaking of an early meal which the Moolla and his wife had prepared. Burma Naik, with an escort, accompanied them, the old Syud and Zóra riding easy ponies with saddle-bags, which Runga had procured for them, with Mamoolla mounted on another, which carried their small amount of cooking utensils, while the simple Ahmed drove another pony laden with their worldly goods. So the little procession was formed, which went out of the gate of the town eastwards to Kukeyra, and which was followed with dim, tearful eyes by Runga. "When shall I see them again?" he murmured. "Whither may not the old man's new projects lead him? Free, after years of seclusion, he will not now readily settle down, even for Zóra's sake, and in respect to her is as simple as a child. May the Gods protect them, and lead them safely."

It was a fresh pleasant morning when the little party left Korikul, and the strange, novel motion was delightful to Zóra. All her life she had been confined to the gloomy fortress and its rocks, with the roaring or murmuring river ever in her ears. Now there were green fields and luxuriant waving grain; cotton with its bright yellow blossoms, and wayside plants and flowers all new to

her. In place of the frowning rocks of the ravine of Juldroog, there was an open fertile country, with some low hills on the left hand, and a level plain to the right which sloped gradually down to the great river, which could be seen at intervals gleaming in the sun, while the rugged peak of the fortress seemed to rise out of the basin of hills and rocks; and Zóra could even see the small white pavilion on the high rock before the palace, where, in days gone by, she had often sat to watch the cataract and the boiling foaming river beneath it. Should she ever see them again? Even her grandfather, generally so silent, was stirred by a new sense of freedom which he had not known for years. Ah, so many now! Aged as he was, he felt a new strength and power as the stout beast he bestrode with the air of a cavalier walked on firmly and speedily. "This is delicious, Zóra!" he cried. "No longer the few steps between the house and the mosque, no longer the close stifling air of the narrow ravine of Juldroog, but the free fresh air of the country and the fields. I cannot see them, child, but their perfume refreshes me, and I feel new life and vigour. Surely it is a blessed beginning of the path we have chosen; and thou, be thankful then in thy heart, child, as I am."

"I am thankful, Abba," she replied, urging her pony up to his side. "And I am free, too, from the danger that threatened me. I could never have been at peace in Korikul after those women had found us out; and Burma tells me there is no danger now, for there

are Beydurs in every village, and there will be orders given to pass us on from stage to stage, and to guard us always. So we can go miles and miles, further and further; and he will take care of the cows and the goats while we are away, and send them to us when we return, or wherever we may be."

And thus they travelled on their first stage of a few miles, chatting with each other, while the old man every now and then recited portions of the Koran, or from Persian poets that he remembered, and even passages in Arabic of the Turreequt, which at last he had undertaken. Presently Burma Naik, who had been riding in advance, stopped and said to them, "Yonder is the village, and my horn-blower will sound a signal that we approach. It is my own village, the Beydurs there belong to my division, and my wife and family live here, but when Runga is away on his duty I reside at Korikul. Is not my home pretty? I think it the most beautiful of all our villages, and there is not one empty house in it. But you will see it better when we get nearer."

Even from the distance they were, the appearance of Kukeyra was very inviting. It seemed like a large cluster of houses rising towards the centre, and was embosomed in trees and gardens. To the left the low range of hills rose considerably, and were covered with wood, part of which extended along the road by which they were travelling, and being without underwood or jungle, looked like a park. Cattle were grazing in large numbers on the short green

sward, or lying under the shade of large trees. "This is our hunting ground, lady," said Burma to Zóra, "and there are plenty of wild hogs in the small ravines up there; and when they are driven from thence they take to the islands in the river, so we always know where to get them when we have a hunt. And look! yonder are antelopes grazing in a herd, and there are hares and pea-fowl among the grass, and my people protect them all. You have never seen these things before."

"No, indeed," replied Zóra; "how could I in the fort? But I have seen panthers and bears climbing about, and pea-fowl sometimes came down to the river side to drink, and I and other girls used to look at them."

"Well, you shall see all here, if you like—that is, if Abba does not object. But here no one is veiled, for we are all Beydurs, except a few farmers and weavers, and but seven families of Mussulmans, one of whom is the Moolla; but he is not like Abba; he cannot read or write, and, indeed, is not very different from a Beydur, and he is a capital shot."

Zóra's eyes opened wide at the idea of a Moolla who could only shoot well. "And there is no mosque, then?" she asked.

"No, lady, not even one; there is only a thatched shed which is used for the Mohurrum, which the Beydurs keep as well as the Mussulmans; but you will see all yourself. Now blow thy horn, Bheema," he said to the trumpeter, when they had reached the

summit of a slight elevation, which gave them a better view of the village. "Blow stoutly, that they may hear;" and the blast was long and varied, with a peculiarly strange cadence at the close. It was evidently heard, for after a short interval, during which they remained where they were, a similar blast was blown from one of the towers of the gate, on which there was a red flag with a figure of Hunooman, the monkey-god, on its field in white. "Well blown, Krishna," said Burma, laughing; "'tis a hearty welcome to you, Huzrut. If the Rajah himself had been approaching it could not have been more complete; and hark! there are the pipes."

As they neared the village, Zóra saw how prosperous it looked. All the houses to be seen were perfect, and the wall itself was perfect too, and its bastions firmly built of stone. Gardens filled the space up to the wall, among which were some graceful clumps of bamboos, with mango and tamarind trees, with gardens of lemon trees for supplying the dyers at Korikul with the juice of the fruit, as well as the population for domestic use. Here and there, too, a solitary cocoa-nut tree waved its graceful foliage in the air; and as to date palms, they were numerous in groves to the south. Zóra expected to see their new home at every turn, but there were only solitary huts in the gardens, for watchers and labourers.

At last, near a large bright green sugar-cane field, they met the village procession and the musicians, who kept up a spirited

but shrill piece of music intended for a welcome, accompanied by their own drummers; and four Beydurs, with their large tambourine drums, leaped, strutted, circled round and round, and performed their most elaborate exercises. The din of the music prevented Zóra from asking questions, and the party could only follow the lord of the place, who rode first. At the gate of the village, however, was the real reception. Pointing out the venerable Syud to all, the authorities, that is, the head man, or Patell, who was not a Beydur, the Kurnum or accountant, a Brahmin, the blacksmith, the carpenter, and many others, touched the old man's feet and Zóra's, and bid them welcome; and they waved trays with lighted lamps in them, and flowers over their heads; and when this was all done, the little procession formed once more, and proceeded through the main street of the village, which was cleanly swept, and the houses ornamented with bright cloths which hung over the parapets of their roofs.

The street was lined with men and women, holding up their children to see the holy man; and Zóra already saw several faces among the women that she knew, who had come to Juldroog for medicine for their children or their husbands; and it was evident she was not forgotten. Every one was dressed in their best, and the whole place seemed what it might be at a festival. Thus they passed out of the eastern gate of the village, and almost close to it, a little withdrawn, was the Tukeea, or "Pillow of residence," which was to be their abode.

It was a low, long thatched cabin, whitewashed without, standing in a small piece of ground by itself, and shaded by a noble banyan tree and others about its precincts. A cloud of parroquets, green pigeons, mynas, and other birds, rose from the giant branches, and flew screaming into the air as the music passed from under the gateway, and gladdened Zóra's heart. When had she not had birds about her? Then Abba was lifted from his pony, and a carpet spread in the shade, and everyone came and bowed before him, and bade him welcome. Even little children were held out by their mothers, that the old man might lay his hands on them. And the Moolla was there, who looked like a Beydur soldier more than a priest, and besought Abba to teach him something. Then the time came at which they might enter the house, which, it must be told in secret, had been fixed by the Brahmin astrologer, as there was none other; but he was present also, as were others belonging to the temple, to welcome one for whom all the country round had respect and affection. Indeed, it was a moving sight to see all these people, strangers in faith and previously unknown, receive the venerable Syud as they did, and pay him honour; and Zóra's heart was stirred within her, and she wept tears of joy as she sat behind part of the trunk of the giant tree and heard women calling to her, "We bless you because you helped the sick and denied no one."

Then her grandfather was led into the house by the

Moolla and the Patell, as accepted by the whole community; and Zóra and old Mamoolla followed, and found the place neat and clean and very commodious, for there were three comfortable rooms, that in the centre being the largest. There was a kitchen behind, a shed for the two cows and the goats, and a verandah along part of the front, in which her father could sit. There was a well near the house, where many people from the village came to draw water. Above all, it was very quiet, fitted for religious meditation, and, as Zóra thought, the very place for her grandfather in his present frame of mind. And when all had retired, and the beds they had found ready for them were covered with their thin mattresses and quilts, and the old man lay down to take rest after his unaccustomed exercise, he called Zóra to him, and she went and put her head into his lap, and he said, with a quivering voice, "The Lord has been good to us, my child, forget not this in thy thoughts;" and he lay down and slept peacefully. Without were the songs of birds; the cooing of ringdoves and pigeons in the great tree; the fresh breath of the sweet air came through the doorway, and the murmur of voices in the village seemed assuring. Without, a bed of purple amaranths and marigolds glowed in the sun, and pretty lizards basked in it, and chirped, or sometimes looked towards the house as if to say, Who have come to disturb us? Yet it was a pleasant place, and full of rest and peace; and she was thankful, very thankful.

CHAPTER VI.

A DARING ATTACK.

IT is very probable that the readers of this tale have never even heard of the Beydurs who have some part in it; but their history and position are interesting, and at the risk of a short digression we will endeavour to explain enough of both to help to assure the reader that they are real people, and not mere invention.

The Beydurs, under the name of Veddur, still used by the wilder part of the tribes who inhabit the mountains and forests of south-western India, are what is termed ordinarily one of the aboriginal races, as seen in their native condition in the forests of Travancore and Mysore. They are savages, wearing little or no clothing, cultivating no land, except in isolated instances, and subsisting upon fruits, roots, and the like, and collecting honey, bees-wax, and other forest produce, which they exchange for such articles of clothing and such necessaries as are indispensable. These portions of the tribe are now comparatively few in number, and altogether unimportant. They have been driven at some ancient period from the plains into the mountains of the west, and have not emerged from their original barbarism.

Other portions of the tribe which remained in the plains of southern India and in Mysore became, in some respects, civilised, and at one time attained a considerable degree of power, which, however, was shattered by the great Hindoo dynasties that gradually arose long before the Christian era, and the Veddurs, now adopting the appellation of Beydur, became soldiers and tillers of the soil, but never artisans, or reaching any degree of education. Under chiefs of their own, some small principalities were formed westward of Madras, some of which still exist, but most have disappeared in wars with the first Mussulman invaders and with ourselves. In North-Western Mysore, also, the Beydurs attained considerable power. They held many strongholds, and were feudal vassals of several Hindoo dynasties before the arrival of the Mussulman invaders in the twelfth century; and although the last of these dynasties, that of Beejanugger, fell to the Mussulman arms after the battle of Talikote in A.D. 1564, yet the chiefs of the Beydur tribes submitted to them, and became powerful feudal vassals.

The wars between the Hindoo kingdom of Beejapoor and the Mussulman kingdoms of the Dekhan had continued for several centuries, and their great field of battle and object of contention was the province which lies between the rivers Krishna to the north and Tamboodra to the south, the capitals of which are Moodgul and Raichore. It was sometimes in possession of the

Hindoos and sometimes in the Mussulmans'; thus the allegiance of the Beydur clans became divided; and as the Mussulmans confirmed their hereditary rights and privileges, many of the Beydur chiefs entered their service; and, as the tribe at large were the best infantry soldiers of the period, their service was always valuable.

This portion of them were the allies and servants of the great Bahmuny Mussulman dynasty of Gulburgah and Beedur, and rendered essential service in guarding these southern frontiers, as well as in many general actions; and from having in the early period been confined to the frontier of the Tamboodra river, they gradually extended themselves over the Raichore Dooab, and their chiefs formed small principalities which originally must have been independent, or held in feudal service, but which now exist only in name. In northern Mysore, the chieftainships of Chittledroog, Hurpunhully, once powerful minor states, were overwhelmed by Hyder Ali and Tippoo Sultan, and the present representatives are now pensioners under the British Government; and the last Beydur state, Shorapoor, situated in the Dooab, which lies between the Bheema to the north and the Krishna to the south, having rebelled in 1858, was attached, and is now the property of the Government of His Highness the Nizam.

At the close of the sixteenth century, however, the period of our tale, this Beydur principality held a high position. A portion

of the tribe had at first, probably about the fourteenth century, crossed the Krishna, and their earliest settlements were at Korikul, Kukeyra, and the villages on the left or northern bank of the river; thence they spread all over the province, their chief or naik selecting Wakin-Keyra, a village at the extreme end of a rugged chain of hills, where there was a strong position, as his capital, which he fortified. The tribe then could muster twelve thousand well-armed infantry militia; and beside these the Rajah had a force of other soldiers, horse and foot, amounting to about four thousand more. His revenues were not derived from the land only, but from dues in various provinces, being a percentage on the revenues—this, in most instances, being literally the Beydur's black mail; and as the militia not only assisted the reigning King of Beejapoor, but protected the whole of his eastern frontier against aggression by the King of Golconda, the tribe was held in high estimation, and certainly fought bravely wherever they were employed.

Thus, in this history, we find them not only at Juldroog but at Beejapoor, and marching under Runga Naik to the King's camp, which was in the field north of the Bheema. These intimate relations between the Beydurs and the kingdom of Beejapoor continued till its fall before Aurung Zeeb; and almost the last resistance the great Emperor encountered in the Dekhan was at Wakin-Keyra, which, after a noble defence, through several

separate seiges, fell at last under the attack of a very large army which had been summoned from the south of India for the purpose; and the Rajah, finding Wakin-Keyra too weak and too confined for a permanent residence, took up a new position in a secluded basin of the range, and founded the town of Shorapoor, which is the present capital of the district. Shorapoor had held its own against the Nizam, the Mahrattas, and Tippoo Sultan. It had avoided collision with any one, and had increased in wealth; but of late years it had been misgoverned and oppressed, and the name only of its former power remained, and it at last fell to rise no more, under the effect of a foolish attempt on the part of its Rajah to attack a British force, in which he suffered a disgraceful defeat

The Beydurs as a people are essentially different from ordinary Hindoos. Some of them attend Hindoo services and conform to the ministrations of Brahmins, but for the most part they are followers of the Lingayet doctrine, or hold to their ancient aboriginal worship of natural objects, glens, water-falls, rocks, trees, and the like. They do not accept or desire education in any form, and are of a freer, bolder type—both in manner and customs—than ordinary Hindoos. They are great sportsmen in all respects; bold in following tigers, panthers, and bears on foot; and ordinarily they live upon whatever game they can shoot or snare. In person both men and women are remarkably neat and

clean, and their homes and villages well kept. They are also industrious cultivators and farmers, and own a great quantity of land in their province. They are likewise public carriers of cotton and salt to and from the coast; and, in short, are rarely idle, and by no means dissipated. Formerly they were dreaded for raids on their neighbours, and in cattle-lifting especially were most daring and expert; but those times and deeds have passed away, though their memory lives in many a song and legend.

Beydurs hold themselves to have no caste, and they eat everything except carrion, and such birds or beasts as feed upon it. They also object to beef, because the slaughter of kine is offensive to Hindoos, and especially to Brahmins. They marry exclusively into their own tribe, and rarely have more than one wife, though their chiefs take as many as they can support.

Perhaps we need not follow the Beydur clans further, and we have recorded enough to explain the position they occupied at the period of our tale in the country in which its action is laid, and where the clan still exists, not in its former rude splendour and strength, but as peaceful and industrious inhabitants. I may mention that I had intimate experience of them for eleven years, when, during the minority of the late and last Rajah, I ruled over them and their province alone. But to resume.

The time passed pleasantly and quietly in the new home, and there was no jealous wife to disturb it. Burma's wife was his

second, a fine young woman of hardly twenty as yet. His first wife had died while yet very young, and had born him no children. The present, Enkama, had two, and her home was a happy one. She managed her great good-natured husband admirably ; and so long as she did not interfere with his office as part guardian of the frontier and head of the Kukeyra portion of the tribe, she had full liberty to do as she pleased with household and farming affairs. She had many buffaloes and cows, and her dairy produce was large. She was fond of her gardens, in which all kinds of vegetables abounded, which she sent regularly to the market at Korikul ; and when the river was fordable, even across the river to Goorgoonta and other towns. She superintended the ploughing of the land, sowing, weeding, and gathering in of the crops, with a delight she did not conceal ; and while ready to punish lazy labourers, men or women, was kind and considerate to those who served her well. Most charitable was she, too, and kind to all ; and, as the people said, there was ever a blessing following her, and increasing her store. In the house or out of the house she was never idle. When the morning meal had been served to all, consisting of piles of jowarree bread, pots full of boiled pulse, and vegetables, of which she and her husband partook also, and the floors were plastered with liquid clay, she sat down to her spinning wheel with her servant, and so worked till it was cool enough to go out again. Sometimes she rode a strong pony ; at

others, with a long staff in her hand, trudged over ploughed fields, or watched the weeding of crops which, without her supervision, would be carelessly done by the lazy hussies who were hired to do it. A clever cotton picker, too; not ashamed to work all day in the field, and carry home a bundle on her head bigger than any one else's. Withal a pleasant, cheery woman, of no particular beauty, truly, but of an upright graceful figure, whose lines were like those of a Grecian statue, with a pleasant good-natured expression of face, and the whitest teeth. Not fair in colour, but a rich ruddy brown, which had strong healthy blood coursing under her skin.

Here was a new friend for Zóra, for whom she took a great liking, and whom she constantly came to see, bringing with her whole baskets full of household sweetmeats, vermicelli, fruits, vegetables, and whatever she thought would be liked; and she always enjoyed a short chat with the girl under the verandah, or most generally, when the ground was dry, under the great banian tree. Enkama knew nothing, so to speak, except tales of the deeds of the Gods, especially of Krishna, and scraps of the Mahabharut and Ramayun, as she had heard Brahmins and bards recite them; but she was a great authority upon the subject of the old wars between the Hindoos and the Toorks, as she called the Mussulmans, and could recite the ballad legend of King Firoze Shah and the Goldsmith's Daughter of Moodgul, and the death of King Majahid

Shah, who had broken the image of Hunooman at Humpee. She was thus a pleasant companion to Zóra, and Zóra in turn appreciated the good dame's sound practical sense, industry, and kindness. They could not be intimate friends, because Enkama saw how much she was below Zóra in knowledge, and how different were the courtly manners of the girl from those of her own Beydur class; indeed, Zóra's language in ordinary conversation was so refined in comparison with her own, that she felt birth and intelligence had separated them very far. Very often she sent her children with the servant to play under the great tree, and would find Zóra with other girls, making dolls'-houses or dressing up dolls, and making dolls' feasts to amuse the little ones. Reader! there is the same common humanity everywhere, and a Beydur child with a rag or wooden doll and a pennyworth of sugar to feed her companions is as proud and happy as the aristocratic child whose doll has cost, we will not say how much, and whose cradle is trimmed with lace and covered with eider down.

Then there were a few Mussulman girls in the village who, though young, could learn something; and their mothers, who knew nothing, gladly brought them to Zóra, who could teach them sewing, to mend their father's clothes, how to knit his drawers-strings, and to begin embroidery. Zóra had sold all her stock of embroidered caps and boddices, and had gained a good many rupees by them, and she was working others as fast as she could

to get more. So these were pleasant occupations, and she had pleasant, innocent company; and, besides all this, she had to help Abba in his "Turreequt, or path to Heaven;" and, as he could not read, and the books he had were Arabic, she had to follow his recitation, and when he missed a passage or a word, to spell it for him as well as she could, when he would give her the proper pronunciation and explain the meaning, and thus she felt, if he persevered, that she should gain some superficial knowledge of that language which might be of use to her hereafter. And was Maria forgotten? Ah, no! but was the more preciously remembered; and when Zóra was tired of reading or working, and lay back on the little carpet she had spread under the giant tree, she could look up among its interlacing branches and watch the doves and wild pigeons, the flocks of paroquets, flying in play from branch to branch; the old horned owls come out of the holes in the tree and peer about, the little grey owls twitting and constantly on the move, and the beautiful lizards chasing each other from hole to hole along the deep furrows of the bark; and listen, too, to the pleasant singing birds, who, though seldom to be seen among the deep foliage, yet twitter songs of their own which were pleasant and soothing to listen to. Yes, those were happy days, and they passed smoothly and uneventfully for some weeks, and as if they were never to come to an end. But Zóra knew better than this. She

knew that her grandfather's restlessness would again come on him, and that the Turreequt could not be fulfilled in Kukeyra. Meanwhile, her dreamy life continued; nor will we say how much the night scene with the wounded and delirious Abbas Khan mingled with it. Had he forgotten her? Ah, no! she hoped not, for he seemed ever present with her; but their lives had drifted so far asunder. And Maria had not replied to her simple little letter, to which an answer might have arrived by one of the messengers who constantly brought letters from Beejapoor before she left the fort. Yet still she trusted and hoped, and the faith of the girl was not shaken.

Nor was her grandfather idle; and though he was evidently becoming more and more absorbed in his religious meditations, he had not given up the concerns of the world. There were only a few families of ignorant Mussulmans in the village, most of the members of which could not even repeat the Belief; but these were gathered together on Friday (the Sabbath) for instruction such as they could comprehend; and as Friday was the weekly market-day of the little town, many Mussulmans came with their field and garden produce, and weavers with their manufactures; and then the old man had larger gatherings and regular prayer services, and preached to them on simple subjects, most especially against drinking palm wine, which, not being wine or spirits, was held to be excusable and allowable. So the residence

of the Syud and his granddaughter at Kukeyra was not devoid of usefulness; and, in spite of its being a Beydur town, and therefore held to be generally unclean, their lives were peaceful and undisturbed. But this was not to be of long continuance.

Huleema, the eldest daughter of the Moolla, a handsome and intelligent girl, and Zóra's most advanced pupil, had long been betrothed to the son of the Moolla of a town some miles to the north, where resided the only Kazee of the province, and where a number of Mussulman weavers lived. Now, the period of marriage was fixed, the Kazee had consented to perform the ceremony, and had appointed the day. Invitations had been issued to all friends, but that to the old Syud was brought by the girl's father and mother, who besought of him to come to their house and pronounce the final blessing. There would be such amusement in the course of the evening as poor folks could provide, and there was an empty room at his service, while Zóra could remain with the women of the family.

The old man demurred at first, but Zóra pleaded that he should go. She had promised the girl to be with her at her marriage if her grandfather remained at Kukeyra, and as yet he had not signified his intention of travelling onwards.

The day arrived, and in the afternoon Zóra, casting a sheet about her, led her grandfather through the village gate and small Bazar up to the Moolla's house, which was in one of the principal

streets, and from the high roof of which there was an extensive view to the south, west, and east. A screen of bamboos, covered thickly with date palm leaves, had been erected as a sunshade, and here most of the women guests were assembled, who received Zóra with homely courtesy and welcome; but Huleema could not spare her friend, and Zóra was soon engaged in the preliminary ceremonies of bathing, anointing with ground turmeric and sandal wood paste, similar offices being performed by men for the bridegroom, and these ceremonies, of which we spare the reader the detail, necessarily occupied some hours.

Meanwhile the old Syud was very happy. The men, and especially the Kazee of Kembavee, had received him with affectionate courtesy, and they had placed him in the seat of honour, and offered him sherbet to drink. Of course there was no one so learned as himself, but the Kazee was a man of some education, both in Arabic and Persian, and had read some religious books of an easy character. He had also a knowledge of law and logic, and a slight acquaintance with ordinary works on medicine. He had studied in the colleges of Beeder and Beejapoor, and from the high court of the latter held his diploma as Kazee. The appointment he occupied was a lucrative one, as his dues extended all over the province. Some other intelligent guests were present, and the evening passed pleasantly enough. Then the Shubgusht, or marriage procession, formed before the house, and the bride being

seated in a palanquin, her husband followed on a stout pony, both being dressed in red muslin garments as gaily as possible. It was a public procession, the gates of the village were open, and strangers from other localities mixed freely with the crowd that thronged the streets. Burma Naik, who, being a Beydur, could not take a part in the ceremony, nor sit among the chief guests in the house, had nevertheless held a court of his own in the outer portion of it, now headed the procession on his fine horse, and was accompanied by a number of his men, who fired their matchlocks and cheered the bride with those strange shrieks and yells in which the Beydur youth delight. Thus, what with these, the blasts of many horn-blowers, the pipes and drums of several villages, and the general noise and clatter, nothing could be distinctly heard, and all was merry confusion.

The procession was to pass along part of the Bazar, then traverse the main street to the west gate, and, returning by the only other wide street to the Bazar again, proceed as far as the east gate, whence a deputation would convey an offering to the old saint's tomb, which was under the Banian tree. Such had been the programme, which was rudely interrupted. As the procession had reached the western gate, a sudden shouting of "Thieves! Thieves! Dacoits!" was heard, and several shots were fired. There had been strong guards posted at both entrances, and some of the armed men ran up the Bazar to reinforce the eastern

gate, while Burma and about fifty of his men dashed through the western gate, and guided by the shots and shouts, passed down a lane which ran round the south side of the village among the gardens. Here was a point at which several roads separated, and here he stationed some of the men, posting himself opposite, so that no one could escape. It was evidently an attack by Dacoits, under cover of the noise and merry-making of the marriage procession, but against whom? And he set his teeth, drew his sword, and awaited the approach of the fugitives and their prisoners, and in a few moments they had arrived, some twenty men, a strong band, who might have overpowered by their sudden rush any weaker persons than those who now met them face to face. Crying to his men to spare none, he attacked the strange party, and in a few moments several were wounded, two killed outright, and six taken prisoners. The rest, many or few they knew not, escaped through the hedges which lined the road into the thick gardens and sugar-cane fields, and were beyond pursuit. But Burma had as many as he wanted, and the men's hands being tied with turbans, they were escorted to the village gate, where the Chaoree, or town hall, was situated. This was common ground, and Beydurs, as well as others of all castes, crowded into it. Among those who had come down from the Moolla's house were the Kazee of Kembavee, some respectable Moollas and weavers, with Brahmins, and generally most of those

who had not joined the procession. A few, however, remained with the old Syud.

"I was about to send for you, Kazee Sahib," said Burma Naik, "and you must help me to inquire into this. And do ye all, sirs," he continued to others, "assist me to do justice. One of my men, a fine young fellow, first in the pursuit, has been speared by one of the Dacoits, and is already dead; another, I fear, is dying. This is murder, and justice must be done. Were I alone, indeed, I should dispose of them at once without mercy; but as the representative of the King is present, I shall do nothing till he has spoken. Bring up the prisoners. Ha!" he continued, as one was led forward, "thou, Kalloo! Methought thou wouldst not have tried thy hand here."

"Be quick," said the man, a tall, powerful fellow, who still held a spear shaft in his hand, from which the blade had been removed, "be quick; hear what I have to say, for I am dying. Give me a drink of water;" and someone handed a vessel full to him, from whence he drank greedily. "Enough!" he said, as he gave it back. "Listen, Burma Naik, you know me, Kalloo Jutt, and I deny it not. I have done my last deed. There, read that, and you will see why I did it, and what it was to have been. Ah! I was a fool to disobey the omens, but there was no time to delay. I can speak no more."

Then the Kazee opened the paper in which a letter was wrapped, and which the robber had taken from his waistbelt. It was in the Mahrathi character, and the village accountant was called upon to read it. Twice he cast his eyes over it, and seemed as if afraid to do so, when Burma Naik snatched it from him, and said, "Now come and read it, while I look over it with thee. But, Kazee Sahib, it bears the seal and the signature of Osman Beg, the Governor of Juldroog, and I can guess what its purport may be." And the document ran thus :—

"To Kalloo Naik Jutt, from Nawab Osman Beg, Bahadoor, greeting, and health and grace from Alla attend you.

"Whereas Zóra, the granddaughter of the Syud Dervish who lived here, has escaped, and is now at Kukeyra, under the protection of the rebel Burma Naik, and lives in a house outside the entrance gate of the village, you are therefore to go there with your men and take her up and bring her to me, without hurting even a hair of her head. I do not want the old man, he is useless to me; but if he resist he can be slain. These are my orders; and if this service is well done, and without hurt to Zóra-bee, who will belong to my harem, I will hold you free from all question by the Government in case any trouble shall arise; and I will give you, on receiving Zóra-bee aforesaid from your hands, the sum of five hundred hoons of gold.

"You are to believe this fully, and act on it fully, and without fear.

"The seal and signature of Osman Beg, son of Heidur Beg, Toorcoman."

"How strange!" cried the Kazee; "I received a letter from him only yesterday, asking me to come to Juldroog to-morrow, and having rested here to-night, should have gone to him."

"Yes!" said the dying man, faintly, "Mother Bheemee, from Raichore, was to have received her; and I sent my aunt Chimee to find out about the marriage here."

"I thought I had seen the old witch once in the Bazar, and only that it is not safe to cross her, would have had her head shaved."

"It was a narrow escape," said the Kazee; "the Lord be praised for it, and that I am delivered from seeming connection with this sin."

"And I say," continued the robber, who sat up, with staring eyes, as if making a supreme effort, "I say, and bear ye all witness, that the Nawab told me to get the child to him before morning, and he would dishonour her. That the Kazee was only a sham, and would not be allowed to cross the river;" and then, with a violent effort, he tore away the bandage which had for the time restrained the bleeding from the wound in his neck; the blood rushed forth, and with a shrill scream he fell back and died.

"A sad event for a merry marriage," said the Kazee; "but it is evident to us that the innocent are protected by the Almighty. Let no one tell the lady or her grandfather; let them sleep in peace. As to the rest of the prisoners, deal with them according to border custom. There is no law in the case."

"Yes," said Burma, grimly, "I will deal with them; and see, this has been brought from beneath the banian tree."

It was a common rough bedstead, with bamboos at each corner tied together. Underneath the place where they joined one large thick pole had been introduced to carry it by, and over all a thick black blanket was cast, which would have at once concealed and secured the inmate; and had anything occurred to prevent Zóra going to the marriage, the expedition of the Jutts might have been successful.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST ALMS.

THE old Syud had heard nothing of the alarm of the previous night, which had been carefully concealed from him and also from Zóra; and after early morning prayer, they took their leave and returned home with Ahmed and their old servant, Mamoollâ; but as soon as they arrived, Mamoolla's tongue was at once loosened when she saw that the chain and padlock of the door had been cut in two, and two of the Beydur guard at the gate followed them to ask if anything were missing.

"Oh, Zóra-bee!" cried the old woman, who seldom spoke except on small domestic matters, "only to think that robbers attacked the house last night, and have carried off my two best cooking pots that were tinned newly last Bazar day, and were as bright as silver. How shall I cook your breakfasts? Where shall we get others? Alla! Alla! And the master's quilt and mattress are gone, and your petticoat and scarf that I had washed and hung up to dry! Oh, Zóra-bee! And they have taken everything, perhaps, and we are Fakeers in earnest. Oh, child! ask Abba to return thanks for our deliverance, for had we been here we should all have been

murdered. What would have become of thee, my child?" And the old dame flung her arms about Zóra and wept plentifully; nor was Zóra herself less affected. She saw at a glance that violence had been done; but the door of her own chamber, which had been locked also, had not been disturbed, and all her grandfather's books, papers, and medicines were safe.

"Why are ye both wailing?" cried the old man, petulantly. "What is there to cry about? Where are my quilt and mattress, and my prayer carpet?" he continued, feeling for them in their accustomed places. "Who has taken them? Cannot that meddling old dame let them alone? Bring them to me quickly, I need them."

Then Zóra went to him, and put her arms round his neck, and sobbing as she was, said to him, "Abba! why have we enemies? We have been robbed while we were away last night. Let us return thanks to God that we were not here when they came, or we might have perished."

The Syud was soothed at once. "In the path to Heaven," he said, reverently, "there are many dangers to be encountered, child; pitfalls everywhere to the soul and to the body; weary rocks and stones to travel over; and whatever happens must be endured. O Alla Kureem! I thank thee," he continued, raising his joined hands, "for this thy deliverance. The enemy truly came, but thou hadst provided us with help, and in thy name we will distribute Fatehas.

"What enemy, Abba?" asked Zóra, trembling, as her heart suggested only one.

"I may be wrong," replied the old man; "but my heart tells me plainly, nay, as if that bad man had said it to us, that none other can have done it but Osman Beg and his men; or perhaps he himself came, under cover of the noise, and shouting and firing of guns last night."

"Let us go, Abba; let us go wherever God leads us; we are ever safe with Him; but not so near our persecutor. Let us go now, to-day. Oh, Abba, do not stay!"

Just then there was a sound of many footsteps near the door, and Burma Naik cried in a cheery voice, "Is all well with thee, Huzrut?" and the Kazee of Kembavee and others cried out, "Is all well with thee, Huzrut, and the child? Arise, and come to us, for we have much to say to thee." And the old man, led by Zóra to the door, went and sat down in his accustomed seat, while all present crowded round him with congratulations. "And see," said Burma, "here are thy mattress and pillow, and quilt, and two cooking vessels, and some other things which the robbers dropped in their flight. Here, Ahmed, carry them inside."

They were, indeed, all that had been taken; and old Mamoolla hugged the vessels to her heart, kissed them, and cried over

them like one distraught. No, they had lost nothing but Zóra's muslin scarf, and that was an old one.

"Now shut the door, Zóra-bee," cried Burma, "for we have that to say to thy grandfather to which thou must not listen. He can tell thee afterwards if he lists." Then Burma proceeded to relate how, when the bridal procession had passed out by the west gate, some men had been observed by the guard on the east gate bastion moving about the trunks of the great banian tree, but were not noticed at first; but when the door of the house was broken in, and a torch lighted, it was certain they were Dacoits, and the whole of the guard rushed upon the robbers, firing their matchlocks at them to give an alarm. Then one Beydur related how the gang had fled, and were pursued and overtaken, on which a combat, hand to hand, took place, and one of the Beydurs had been speared to death and another badly wounded, and several of the robbers were wounded and two killed. How, then, the gang, which consisted of about thirty men, again fled, and was met by the Naik himself, and all was soon over.

"My men at the gate were watchful and brave," said Burma; "and when any man of mine does a gallant act I reward him after our simple fashion. Is it your pleasure, Huzrut, that they should receive what I have prepared for them? and will you honour the poor fellows by giving it to them with your own hands?"

"Surely, surely," said the old man, much affected. "Where are they, that I may bless them?"

"Here are four silver armlets for those who fought best, and here are the men; put your hands on their heads, and give each one." When this was done, a bundle of new turbans and scarves was brought, and one of each being laid together, some twelve or fourteen sets were distributed as the armlets had been.

"I have to feed them, too, Huzrut," said the Naik, laughing, "and give them plenty of séndhee (palm wine) to drink; and they will all be happy after the poor lad who died has been burnt. Now, away with ye all!" he cried to the crowd of Beydurs assembled. "Away!" And the pipes and drums struck up a wild march, and played them into the town.

"We are now alone, Huzrut; and the Kazee and I would tell thee what we have discovered. The duróra was one planned by Osman Beg."

"Ah! if that could only be proved," interrupted the old man, sadly, "I could take it before the Queen, and pray for justice."

"We have proof enough," said the Kazee; "proof that I, a humble servant of God and the State, can testify to, if needs be. But it is hardly required, for we have a document, signed and sealed by Osman Beg himself, addressed to Kalloo Naik, who died before us last night, and which he gave up of his own free will, else we had not, perhaps, discovered it. I have appended

a Persian translation to it, and a certificate as to the manner in which it was found; and before the King or the Queen, or the Mufti at the court, that testimony cannot be shaken."

"Ajáib! wonderful!" exclaimed the old Syud. "When we see the finger of the Lord following us and directing us, O Kazee Sahib, can we doubt?"

"Indeed no, father," returned the Kazee, simply; "but there is still more. Here is a letter from Osman Beg to myself in his own handwriting, bearing his seal, which is exactly similar to that on the other paper, and the writing, too, of the Persian letters agrees perfectly. This is an invitation for me to come to Juldroog to-day, and perform the ceremony of marriage with one Zóra-bee. But how was I to understand who that might be? So it is clear, if the Nika was to be performed, Zóra-bee must have gone from hence, for there is no other Zóra-bee that I know of, and it is not a common name in these parts. But if I had even gone," continued the Kazee, "as we all heard from the man who died, it would have been too late, for the last dishonour that woman could suffer would have been inflicted upon her. Nay, even a litter had been provided to carry the child away."

"And it shall be hung up in the Chaoree as witness against him," said Burma, "just as it is."

The old Syud turned from one to another of his informants with wonder and thankfulness expressed in his aged features, and

the tears were coursing down his cheeks as he listened to the details of the affair as given to him by the speakers. "Alla, the merciful and ever-present, protected the child before, and will ever protect the helpless and the orphan; and we owe our lives and honour to Him, and, next to Him, to thee, O Burma Naik. Wouldst thou belonged to Islam, as we do!"

"My ancestors were Beydurs, Huzrut, before Islam existed," returned the Naik, proudly. "No, Huzrut, we are better as we are. But now, what shall we do for thee and Zóra, whom all love here, as she is loved everywhere? What dost thou think, O Kazee?"

"If I may speak, and advise one so superior to me in wisdom and learning, I should counsel thee, O Syud, to proceed at once to Beejapoor; lay thy complaint, and Zóra-bee herself, at the foot of the throne, and cry for justice. Our noble Queen Chand Beebee would not, could not deny justice to an old man, and a holy Mushàekh like thyself, O Syud! Consider this, and go. To remain here is only to run a fearful risk; and worse than that, to endanger strife between the Juldroog troops and the Beydurs, and so lead to reprisals and blood feuds. It would be well to prevent any chance of bloodshed, Huzrut."

Had not the worthy Kazee used the title Mushàekh it is most probable perhaps that the Syud, thoroughly alarmed, might have proceeded at once to Beejapoor, where he knew Zóra desired to go—if only to meet Maria once again; and he felt sure of

justice whenever he might appeal for it. But the mention of the title sent his thoughts on their old errand.

"Sir," he said, "for many years I have been preparing myself for the Turreequt, and without that I can be neither a poor Fakeer or rise to the dignity of one of God's divines, a Mushâekh. The Lord has directed my path hitherto by wonderful events, and I follow the Eastern way; but I see the need of changing it; and you, Kazee Sahib, to whom such mysteries are known, can direct me to the proper course."

"I see but one," he replied. "There is no saint in all these provinces, but the descendant of Syud Geesoo Duráz of Gulburgah, to whom thou couldst go for reception into the Divine order. All other shrines are inaccessible to thee, Huzrut, on account of their distance and thy venerable age. Within a short time is the oorus (anniversary) of the holy saint, Syud Sofee Surmust, at Sugger; and there thousands of Fakeers assemble, of whom many go on to Gulburgah. I can direct thee to Sugger, where I have many friends and some humble disciples; and they will guide thee, and further thee on thy way. Let me see! Thy route is changed to the north, therefore—

Kunujgin Bamshin, Kunujgin Bisma,
Kunujgin Bamshin, Kunujgin Bimash.*

"And then"—and he counted rapidly on his fingers—"Wednesday

* Letters which denote points of the compass.

will be your day for proceeding on your journey, and the Rujub-ool-Gyb will be in the northern quarter, which is good for thee, at the first watch of the day, which is convenient. And if ye all eat a little sour curds for your breakfast, the journey will lead to a happy result. But there is no other good position of the Rujub-ool-Gyb for many days after that, and in a strait like this ye should risk nothing."

The Kazee was an experienced director of journeys and well versed in casting nativities, selecting proper days for marriages and betrothals; and in these respects there was no one who could compete with him; and as the old Syud saw that he was not a pretender, he put the more confidence in his directions.

"I would you could see my granddaughter's horoscope which I cast at her birth myself, or perhaps you have not leisure?"

"I have leisure before me ere it is time to depart, and you will do me a favour if you will show it to me, Huzrut. I will return after I have broken my fast; and the food is even now ready in the worthy Moolla's house, and I must not disappoint his hospitality."

"I have been thinking," said Burma, "how we can best convey the holy Syud to Sugger; and I have a plan in my mind which, if it is approved of, I will put in execution. Syud Moostafa, the Persian secretary of the Rajah, is my friend, and Daood Khan Bhylmee, the leader of the Bhylmee division of horse, is a chief

to whom my force is attached. I will write to them now, if I may, and beg that an escort of horse may be sent to meet Huzrut at Hoonsigee, where he should sleep, and, rising early, go on to Wakin-Keyra; and this could be done without any fatigue. From hence I can send my own palkee, and a litter for the child, and my people as escort."

"A good thought," said the Kazee; "I do not think Huzrut will make any objection."

"Indeed, no," returned the old man; "ye are only too kind to one who has been a trouble to you both. But before we proceed to make other arrangements, may I inquire whether any of the Dacoits are here, I should like to ask them some questions. Who were they?"

"Jutts and Káikárees," replied Burma; "the boldest of all Dacoits and robbers; and who would not be tempted by the sum assured? The leader was Kalloo Naik, a bold, reckless fellow, whom I wounded last night in the scuffle; and, as the Kazee Sahib knows, when he had thrown that paper to us, he tore the bandages from his wound, and died at once. The rest the Kazee Sahib gave over to me, and as one of my people had been slain, they were all hanged but one. It will be a lesson to the tribe not to attempt dacoity here, and recently there has been more than we liked I only sent away one, a boy, who was, perhaps, a spy; and I wrote a letter to the clans that for every duróra they committed

inside our boundaries, I would hang two men, one Jutt and one Káikaree; and this will keep them quiet for some time, for they know that Runga and I always do exactly as we say. If we did not, none of us could sleep safely in our beds. Care for nothing, Huzrut, all shall be prepared for ye, and my wife will come to Zóra presently, and comfort her."

After a while, therefore, the good lady came, bringing with her bags of rice and vermicelli, baskets of sweetmeats, and provisions enough to have lasted them for months. She told Zóra all that had happened, and other women dropping in, related every event of the night with wonderful increase of incidents at each narrative. The Kazee, too, returned, and Zóra's horoscope was produced and discussed. We will not trouble the reader with particulars of astrological predictions in regard to her, but no doubt certain dangers, as well as strokes of good fortune, troubles, and joys, were set forth, which, as they will have their places in this history, need not be anticipated. On taking his leave to depart, the worthy Kazee gave the Marathi letter of Osman Beg to the robber, and that to himself in Persian, to Zóra, bidding her keep them about her person, for the time might come when they would be of use.

Although they had been in Kukeyra less than two months, yet they left the place with regret. Zóra and her grandfather had both established separate interests in the place. It was one in which

Zóra could go about at all times of the day as she had done in the island fortress, and all her old vocations found ample scope for exercise; for in attendance on the sick, and in distribution of medicines, her charitable heart knew no difference between Beydur and Hindoo, or Mussulman. Then it was pleasant to stroll with Burma's wife to her pretty garden, and sit among the cool plantain groves, and under the shade of great mango trees, and hold her little school there, when Abba could spare her; or, when at home, to dream in her seat by the old saint's tomb, under the great banian tree, and watch the lizards and grey squirrels at play, and the shy and pretty tree birds hop silently from branch to branch. But Zóra would not have remained after the incidents of Friday night; she dared not. The unscrupulous attempts of her enemy to possess himself of her, the narrow escape she had had of capture—perhaps death, or worse—caused her to shudder as she thought of them; and all she wished for was to be at rest; far away; where she cared not, so she and Abba were safe.

Even Beejapoor, Burma said, was dangerous, so long as her position was unassured; and he explained to her how lawless bands of men existed there who were ready to undertake any villany for money, and who, in any number, might be hired by Osman Beg, and prove more successful than the robbers had been where she was. It had been a weary thought, this wandering of her grandfather's, but under the terror that possessed her it had even

become welcome now, and Zóra accepted it as part of her fate which could not be averted, and must be endured. Every hour, as the day of departure drew nigh, her grandfather grew more and more petulant and doubtful. They must walk, he said, for they were Fakeers, and had no right to ride. They must beg their daily bread, for they had no need to care for food, and the good Alla would send them what they wanted. At every village they should sing an invocation or a hymn, and he had by heart a great number of these; or they should go about villages and towns with a wallet collecting handfuls of meal, or rice, or pulse. And the old man's determination on this subject seemed unalterable. He even one day sat down at his gate, and spread a sheet, and blessed the passers by, and some threw pice and others cowries, and in the evening Zóra came and took them up; but there was hardly a rupee's worth in all. That, however, was only a trial, the old man said, in a place where they were known to be well provided, and they would do better elsewhere. Still it was a dreary prospect.

They had not to walk, however. During the night before the day of proposed departure, a small party of horse arrived from Wakin-Keyra, and informed Burma that two litters with bearers would meet them at Hoonsigee. So Burma provided his own palanquin for the old man, and a light litter for Zóra, and the ponies were driven on by Ahmed, and the little baggage was distributed

as before; but Zóra gave the two pet cows and the goats to Burma's wife, with many tears, and that good lady kissed her feet, and the children wept aloud at parting with their kind friend. Finally, before noon of Wednesday they set out, and travelled to the end of their stage comfortably; nay, so luxuriously, that the old Syud declared it was more like a nobleman's journey than a poor Fakeer's, and would have no more such after he reached Wakin-Keyra.

So, passing low hills and rocky ground, but with many pretty villages surrounded by green fields and gardens, they reached their destination; and the old Syud, who had been thinking about it all the way, as soon as they arrived at the gate of the little town, desired his litter to be set down. Zóra spread a sheet before him, and seated herself on one side, but rather behind him; and Ahmed, giving up charge of the ponies to Mamoolla, bid her go into the mosque, where they were to put up, and unload the animals, with the help of some of the horsemen's grooms. Then, to the astonishment of the horsemen, one of the little invocations was sung every now and then by all; and, as people began to collect, small contributions were thrown upon the cloth till it was fairly covered; and after her grandfather sung a thanksgiving, though his voice was thin and quavering, Zóra gathered the ends of the cloth together, and, leading him, she carried it to the mosque, where he first took the cloth

as it was, and, kneeling down before the pulpit steps, offered the whole to God, and then sat down to count it. There were more than seven rupees in all, and he gave two to the Moolla and Patell of the town to distribute in charity. "We can live on less than five rupees a day," he said, chuckling, "and we can save two for the expenses of the Turreequt. Oh, blessed day that I departed from slothfulness and idleness; and blessed be Alla, the gracious, who thus leads me, a poor sinner, to his salvation."

It was pleasant, too, in the evening to find people gather about him in the mosque. Zóra and Mamoolla, with Ahmed's help, had nailed up a carpet across a corner as a screen, and sat behind it close to him, and warned off those who would have disturbed his meditations by idle questions; but after he had gone through his daily exercise on the points of salvation and the means of its attainment, people came in, and the conversation became general, and to the Syud delightful, for several of the horsemen belonged to Beejapoor, and some had family or clannish surnames which were familiar, and it was difficult to preserve the entire *incognito* which he had assumed. Presently the call to evening prayer was well sung by the muezzin, and after a plentiful meal they lay down and slept. Not for years past had Zóra remembered her grandfather so cheerful or so full of hope. He woke early, for the azàn was proclaimed; and they prayed together, for none else had arisen. Then he said to Zóra, "Come, child! we must do our duty;" and

taking a long piece of strong cloth, used to make a bundle, she held it by the four corners, and they went their way through the streets, with the simple cry of "Alla diláya to leónga"—"if God gives I will take." Now and then they stopped to sing an invocation, and the clear voice of Zóra sounded sweetly in the fresh morning air. Good housewives were grinding at their mills with many a rough unmelodious song, but none refused to put a handful of meal, or pulse, or rice, into the extemporised basket, which soon became so heavy that Zóra could scarcely carry it, and they returned. When it was all poured out, it formed a goodly heap, and the Syud patted it with his hand and was thankful for it. "We could not eat it all in two days, child," he said; "and we have the money besides. Why need we fear, so long as we put our trust in the granter of prayer?"

After they had all eaten they proceeded as they had done the day before, and the road was less stony and rugged; and when they had passed through a small range of rocky hills and over the embankment of the pretty irrigation lake of Bohnal, with the widespread waters to the west sparkling in the sun and the green rice fields to the east, the fortifications of Wakin-Keyra at the termination of a high and rugged mass of mountains fell on Zóra's sight; and one of the horsemen, dashing up to the Syud's palanquin, told him that he was going on, and that if he would remain for about an hour under the shade of one of the great banian trees of the

embankment, and then follow, he would find all prepared to receive him. So the litters being placed together, they got out of them and sat down, while the waves of the lake dashed among the stones which formed the facing of the earthen bank, with a pleasant refreshing murmur.

CHAPTER VIII.

CASTING OUT DEVILS.

IT was but a short distance, barely more than a mile, to the entrance to the strange fortress in which Pám Naik, the Beydur Prince, held his Court. All that could be seen from a distance were two separate forts on each side of what might be called the gate, well built of granite, and picturesquely and commandingly situated on the summits of high rocks, much after the fashion of the bastions of Juldroog. From these forts, and from bastions below them, two lines of fortification had been carried along the face of the hill to the top, where they were lost in woods that crowned the summit. Flags were flying on all these towers and bastions, which gave the grim-looking works a cheerful expression; and the great standard of the Beydur flew out from the highest tower, fluttering in the western breeze. At the barrier itself the friend of Burma Naik, Syud Moostafa, the Naik's Persian secretary, with others, were in attendance, who received the old man with profound salutations, while some respectable-looking mámas in like manner saluted Zóra, and bid both welcome. They were to remain in the Syud's house, where apartments had been pre-

pared for them; and while her grandfather was carried off, much against his wish, to visit the great Naik himself, Zóra was conducted to the house in which they were to stay.

Wakin-Keyra was a strong place. Inside the second barrier of huge natural rocks the valley extended into a considerable bay or basin, filled by a small artificial lake formed by damming up a stream which descended from the hills. This lake was nearly circular, or perhaps more of an oval shape, and was surrounded by a short sward, always green, except where rocks jutted out from the mountain side, and dipped into the water. All round the sides of this natural basin were the houses of the inhabitants, of all castes, built of stone, cemented with clay or mortar, according to the ability of the builder, and with terraced roofs of lime or clay. The houses seemed to end with a level piece of ground at the eastern end, but from its height, the houses that covered it, and extended to some distance among the woods, could not be seen. The Naik's house, or palace, occupied the greater part of the south side of the amphitheatre, and, though it consisted of a great number of separate buildings and courts, could hardly be distinguished from other private houses that adjoined it, being built in the same manner, in very homely fashion.

The old Syud's account of his reception by the Beydur Rajah Pám Naik was amusing. He had accompanied the Persian secretary to the palace, as it was called, and had been ushered into the

presence of the Prince, to whom he made his salutation. "I would have given much to see him, as he spoke kindly to me in Canarese—his own language—but that was impossible; so I had to listen only, and the secretary and a Brahmin Moonshi, who spoke good Persian, interpreted for me. The Rajah had a number of wants, which I must try to satisfy. In the first place, the new part of his palace, where he wishes to live, is at present haunted by sprites and demons, who must be exorcised and sent away. He has tried many Hindoo exorcists, Brahmins and Bairagees, and some Mussulmans, of whom a saint, who is called the Kala Peer, or Black Saint, was partly successful in one building; but in the others the spirits answered that they would not depart, as they were very comfortable, and they remained. Then the youngest Ranee is troubled with bad visions and dreams at nights, and has become thin and weak, and several children in the house are ailing and the Prince himself has low spirits; and I found his pulse very irregular. So all these things have to be looked after; and thou wilt have many amulets, charms, puleetas, and exorcisms for the house to copy for me, Zóra, and I shall be several days at the work. I have told the Rajah that I cannot begin so arduous and delicate a task without purification and some fasting for three days; and our host, who knows a little of the science, will afford me every facility. And besides, Zóra, he is rich, this Prince, and will give me a great donation, and that will help me in the

Turreequt. Ah, child! we shall win that, by the blessing of Alla, and live happily till death."

"If you will show me which figures you wish for," replied Zóra, "I will get the book, and copy them for you."

"Not yet, not yet," replied her grandfather. "I have to ascertain what sort of spirits they are who have taken possession of these poor people, who are but low caste infidels; and they must be questioned in order that they may declare themselves. And thou wilt have to come too, Zóra, to help me with the women, for they are in private, it seems, and cannot see a man, though I am old and blind; which is foolishness. But they are very ignorant, I fear. And how hast thou been received and cared for, my child?"

"Very kindly, Abba," replied Zóra; "and we have several rooms, and this open verandah to sit in, from which we can see over the whole of the strange city which lies before us—the strangest I ever saw or heard of. There are not so much as ten ells of level ground in it, and the streets are mere paths up the mountain side, and they rise from the pretty tank which fills the bottom. All appears to be a mass of houses, tier above tier; and there is no level ground except at the top, where I see more houses and trees, and green grass. But they are all Beydur houses, they tell me."

"Then where can we go for our evening and morning begging, child? Once we have begun that, we must not abandon it."

"I know not, Abba; but why beg now? More food has been sent from the palace than would last us a week; and the Brahmin clerk who came with it said the same quantity would come every day."

"I tell thee, child, it must be, even if we sat at the door in the street. Once a vow is vowed to the Lord, can it be recalled? God forbid! Our host is too pious a person to object to it, and I will explain all. Now I must bathe. Tell Mamoolla and Ahmed to prepare the hot water while I lie down for a while to meditate, or perchance sleep. At the time of evening prayer the secretary will return home, and we can go together, for it is but a step from hence. Perhaps letters may be sent for us."

On her own part Zóra was curious to see the ladies of the Beydur Prince's family, and the deportment of a perhaps barbarous Court; and as she arrived at the palace in a closed litter, several women servants took charge of her, and she was conducted up a flight of stairs which led to an open gallery, fitted with transparent screens of fine bamboo work, about the middle of which sat the Ranee of the family and several children, who rose courteously to receive Zóra, and—owing to her perfect knowledge of Canarese—put the girl at her ease at once. Never had she met with any persons so loquacious and inquisitive.

They had heard of Juldroog; and an elderly woman present had even paid a visit to Cháya Bhugwuti in fulfilment of a vow, and seen the river mother in her fury. And Zóra had lived within sight and sound of it all her life. Was she married? Was she even in seclusion? And why not? She was too old and too beautiful to be allowed to go abroad into the world. Had she no jewels, no fine clothes? nothing but the coarse soosi she wore, and coarse muslin over it? No, Zóra had replied, they were Fakeers, and every day they begged for alms in the name of Ali, the commander of the faithful. Long they had talked thus, and in the evening lamps were lighted, and Zóra could see how homely everything around her was, except the ladies' persons, for they were covered with valuable jewels and diamonds, which flashed in the lamplight, while they wore magnificent saris of silk, with rich gold borders and ends, very valuable.

Then, after a while, her grandfather's approach was announced, and the ladies rose and retired into an inner room, and the Rajah entered, followed by the old man, led by the secretary and some Brahmins and Beydurs. He did not notice Zóra, who had retreated into a corner with some of the women servants or slaves, and was awaiting the result of her grandfather's visit with some anxiety as to what would happen. Presently he sent for her, and bade her sit by him, and observe for him.

The Rajah, a short, stout man, of fair complexion for a Beydur, seated himself, after a proclamation of his titles by his silver mace-bearers, who then withdrew; and the girl who was possessed by the evil spirit was sent for, Zóra having been cautioned to observe exactly what happened. As he had seated himself, her grandfather had called for a censer and some incense powder; and as Zóra told him the girl was entering the room he threw it on the live charcoal with a paper charm, and a great smoke arose; during which time he was muttering Arabic to himself. Zóra noticed that the girl, who might be about her own age, now trembled violently, and seemed slightly convulsed. She had made efforts with her arms and hands as if to put away the censer, and even to cry out and escape; but she was held firmly by her attendants.

"Bring her to me, that I may breathe upon her," said the old man. "I will not hurt her, but that evil spirit must come out of her, else she will suffer and die. At present it is living in her life."

But the girl would not move; and though they raised her to her feet, she sank down again, shivering and screaming; but the women took her up, and laid her on the carpet before the old man, so that he could place his right hand on her head. Then he said to her in a gentle voice, after repeating another charm, and casting more incense into the censer,—

"Who art thou that possesseth this girl? Speak!" But there was no reply.

"I adjure thee, in the name of Solomon, son of David, of Jibbreel and Azraeel, and of ye, O Abd-ool-Zadir, Zadir Jillaneo, Bhytab, Hunmuntoo, Nursimha, and Bhyraon; speak, and give me thy name!"

Then the girl foamed at the mouth and cried with an exceeding bitter cry, "I am Bassuppa! let me dwell in peace. I love this body, and will remain." The voice was hoarse and deep, like that of a man, and contrasted fearfully with the slight girlish form from which it proceeded.

"Who was Bassuppa?" asked the Syud, but the girl did not answer; she only groaned and sighed bitterly, "Let me alone, let me alone, lest I kill her."

"Who was Bassuppa?" asked the Syud of the Rajah.

"He was her attendant bearer when she was young, and he loved her much, as she did him. He died, and they carried him on a bier down from his home to the burning place, and she saw his body from this balcony over the gate, where the nobat plays. She was immediately attacked by convulsions; and when again she became sensible, declared that Bassuppa had turned his head, opened his eyes, and looked at her, and had remained in her ever since."

"Enough! I understand now what is to be done," said the old

man to the Rajah. "It is a powerful spirit, but one over whom I have command. Fear not, thy child shall be well in three days, and restored to thee."

"She is my pet, my darling," replied the Rajah, with emotion, "and her mother's too. If thou drivest this spirit from the child thou shalt know that a Beydur Prince can be grateful."

"Speak not, my lord, lest you break the spell; it is already working, as I see the child's lips moving. Listen!"

"I must have time to think," she said. "Let me alone till the third day, then I will answer thee."

"Keep her very quiet," said the old man; "let her be amused; make a doll's feast for her, or take her to some garden where she can play, and I will send my granddaughter with some powders that must be given to her as she goes to sleep at night, and as she rises in the morning. And now, Rajah Sahib, may we depart?"

Then pán and uttar were brought, and garlands of flowers; and on a silver tray, covered with brocade, were a few pán leaves with five large gold coins on them; and the old man, when Zóra whispered to him, took them up and tied them in the end of his scarf. But in regard to his vow of begging he would not relax, and when they reached their house her grandfather called to Zóra and said, "We must go, my child," and she led him into the street, along which he walked with difficulty nearly to the palace gate, where they stopped to sing one of the invocations; and Zóra's voice

was so sweet, that many of those who came to the evening Court dropped money into her bag; and after a while they returned, and she found that there was more in it than had ever been before.

Zóra saw little of her hostess, who was a proud woman of a high Syud family, relations of the Wallee, or saint, of the city, and she had by no means approved of her husband inviting the old Dervish to her house. "Thank the Lord we are people of family," she said to him, "and in my father's house. I never heard of a Fakeer being invited to reside in it, or to be attended by our servants as if he were a Nawab. They used to live without, and take what was left of our meals, and that was good enough for them. But this old Syud has very fine notions; his servant and grandchild must cook for him all sorts of dainty dishes, which, I own, they do very well; but they are Fakeers all the same; and though they earn riches, ay, riches every day, they go out at night when that great girl ought to be shut up, and go and sing and bring back a bag of money. I saw them count what they had gained, and there were many rupees, and even some hoons among the coppers. Can this be right?"

"Peace!" said her husband; "thy mouth is bitter, Sitara-bee. Thou shouldst not complain, for all that comes from the palace goes to thee. I tell thee, learned as I am esteemed to be, I have

never met his equal yet, whether in medicine or exorcism. Peace, therefore! the time will come that thou wilt esteem it an honour to have had such a guest beneath thy roof."

"And the girl embroiders caps and knits drawers-strings," cried the dame, with a sneer, "and sells them; and bodices too. Is that a holy occupation?"

"Peace, I say again, Beebee! Thy mouth is bitter and thy tongue long, and it is not good to speak evil of a holy Syud;" and he went out before his wife could reply, as he saw she was determined to have the last word; but she sat down to her spinning-wheel and grumbled notwithstanding. "Shall I ask the girl to get me an amulet against barrenness?" she said to herself, after a while. "I am yet young enough. I wonder what it would cost, or whether the Dervish would give it in exchange for his lodging. I must see about this, for such things are." And she stopped her wheel and sat meditating, with her forefinger between her teeth; while, by the smile that spread over her face, her thoughts were apparently pleasant ones.

The Ranee and the children had departed to the garden at Bohnal, where they were always glad to go to escape the confinement of the palace. There they played about, sat under the shade of the fine trees, went to fish in the lake, and had a play performed by some strolling weavers and stone-cutters, who had joined together for the occasion. They represented scenes in the

life of Krishna, the tutelary divinity of the Rajah's family, and their performance always afforded a great treat. The girl who had been affected by demoniacal influences was now the merriest of the party, and her mother, with a thankful heart, recognised the improvement with gratitude. But what would be the final result? Would the science of the Dervish prevail over, as she believed, the Satanic influence? Well, the third day had arrived, and they returned early in the morning; and soon after a message was brought to the Dervish that the child had fallen down in a fit, and was talking and raving incoherently. A palanquin had been sent for him, accompanied by the secretary, and he was to come directly. But he did not go. He sent word that he had to keep himself pure during the day, and must remain in prayer till evening, when he would come. Meanwhile the child was to be kept quiet, and would most likely sleep.

Zóra heard him during most part of the day repeating incantations, or verses from the Koran, but he would eat nothing. Altogether Zóra was anxious; and though she continued at her embroidery all day she was not the less disturbed, for how many stories had not her grandfather told her of failures in exorcism when the demon had, in spite, entered into the body of the exorcist. "What charm would her grandfather use?" and she had the book on the science, written by His Excellency Mahomed Ghous, upon her knee, when her grandfather called to her.

"Child," he said, "my soul is troubled, for I do not remember a passage in the holy book that I need to recollect. Refer to it, and follow me while I repeat the exorcism entirely. If I fail anywhere, stop me. The puleeta to be used is one where the demon is strange and unknown, and begins, 'Whoever ye are.' It is a square, with a smaller square at the right hand upper corner, which is divided into sixteen even portions."

"I have it here, Abba; say on."

We need not quote the incantation, but the old man repeated it correctly, and was pleased. "Inshalla, child!" he said, "we shall gain the victory. I ought to wield the charm myself, but there is no help for that, blind as I am; thou must do it for me, and as I shall recite the incantation very slowly, thou canst copy the figures, which must be burned while the ink is wet. Meanwhile study it well, that thou make no mistake."

In the evening they proceeded to the palace, where the girl was still moaning in her heavy sleep. All those around her could distinguish, were the words, "He must not come! I will not depart!" The old man had prepared an earthen pot with a cover, which contained some fruits and seeds, and placed some silver pieces of money in it, and smeared the inside with ground sandal-wood paste. Then he passed his hand over the child several times from head to foot; and as the earthen lamp placed on the top of this vessel was lighted, three kinds of oil being used,

those sitting around observed the girl become restless, flinging about her arms and sighing deeply. Her mattress, which had been laid on the floor, was now removed, and the place washed with liquid red clay and cow-dung, and she was taken up and laid upon it; then the exorcist passed his hands over her again, and incense and perfumes were lighted, which cast up volumes of smoke, so that the old man's face as he sat at the girl's feet could hardly be seen. When this had subsided a little he told Zóra to be ready; and she, taking up the pen that had been provided, rapidly drew the outline of the charm large enough to admit of her writing the incantation. The group formed a strange and solemn picture. The girl, lying restless and insensible, extended on the floor, with the venerable old Syud, with his anxious yet benevolent face and long white beard, sitting at her feet, with Zóra by his side. At the patient's head were her mother and several other ladies and servants, weeping bitterly, while the Rajah himself, with the secretary, who was a privileged person, watched the result with intense interest. The room was dark; except where the lamp cast a dim yellow light upon the group, and wreaths of smoke still eddied about the ceiling and walls, seeking egress. The only sounds were the sobs of the women, the occasional low moans of the patient, and the grating sound of Zóra's pen as it passed over the paper. At last the old man, with the usual invocation, "In the name of God most clement and

merciful," began the incantation, "Whoever ye are;" while Zóra plied her pen as fast as she could, copying from the book before her. Every name pronounced was cried with a loud voice, and a considerable pause made, so that Zóra was not hurried, and the whole ceremony being repeated three times, her grandfather took the pen, and Zóra directing his hand to the place, he wrote the concluding words and breathed over the whole. Then the paper was sprinkled with some scented powder, and rolled up tightly, a thread of fine cotton being passed round it; then it was lighted, and as the old man recited passages from the Koran, green and red-coloured flames issued from the burning roll, which all could see; but the girl opened her large eyes, shuddered, and tried to hide her face in the floor. As the paper burned out, she was convulsed for a short time, and then lay still; finally she sat up, opened and rubbed her eyes, and stretching out her arms, said quietly to them all, "Where am I? What has been done to me? There was something sitting on my chest," she continued, innocently, "and it is gone!"

"Shookr! Hazar shookr! Thanks, a thousand thanks!" exclaimed the Dervish. "Lord, thou hast heard my prayer. Friends, he that possessed the child is gone, but he is here among us!"

At this announcement every one shuddered, and the old exorcist called to the spirit to reply; but there was no answer. He then asked the girl whether anything had been said or whispered to

her, and she replied innocently, "Yes. Bassuppa told me he was going away for ever, and would never return; he could not remain, because some one was too powerful, and he cried very much. and I saw him no more. Then I awoke and saw you all;" and she arose, went to the Dervish, and prostrating herself, kissed his feet, and laid her head against them, and then kissed Zóra's feet, and then her father's and mother's, and sisters' all round; and all of them wept tears of joy, while her mother became so excited and hysterical that she was led away for awhile, and the old man gave directions as to where a strong charm was to be pasted up over every door and window; and, calling the girl, he placed another amulet in a handkerchief, and bound it round her arm, till a proper silver case could be made for it; also one to be worn round her neck, attached to her necklace. And he put his hands on her head, and wished her joy and peace in her life, and children to cheer it.

(Perhaps some of my readers will say, Why was this piece of superstitious observance introduced? To which we reply, that it is only as one instance of the many strange beliefs in supernatural effects which exist among Mussulmans and other classes of the people now, and have done so from the earliest times. Many curious and interesting episodes of lives turn upon them, and the belief in them is universal, with exorcisms of evil, mischievous and malignant demons and spirits. There are charms supplied

against every mischance of man or womanhood, youth or age, against haunted houses and the evil eye. On the other hand, there are charms for evil purposes, which are believed and practised as much as the others. The incidents of the exorcism described here took place in presence of the writer of this tale when in India, and he could adduce many equally strange and affecting, or, in some instances, detestable.)

"We can ill repay this kindness, Huzrut," said the Rajah, as they adjourned into the hall of audience, and sat down; "but if you will accept of what I offer, and keep it in remembrance of me, I shall be thankful."

"I would rather, my lord, wait till I am assured that what I have done is effectual," replied the old man, respectfully; "and I must see your daughter every day."

"As you please," returned the Rajah. "I will have my gifts sealed up, and the day you have to depart they shall be given to you. As to your granddaughter, I must leave her to the Lady Ranee, and you must promise me not to interfere with her."

"But at least you cannot refuse this to shield you from the chill night wind," he continued; and he threw a delicate white Cashmere shawl of some value over the old man's shoulders. As to Zóra, she was newly dressed by the good Ranee; and when she emerged from her palanquin at the secretary's house,

she appeared in a gorgeous green silk sari, delicately shot with crimson. She had a valuable gold ring round her neck, and a gold pair of bracelets, and the whole formed a very costly gift. "Would that I could see thee, Zóra," said her grandfather, as he felt the soft rich silk and its heavy gold borders, and touched the ornaments; "but they befit thee, and some day——" and here he broke off suddenly, and was silent. As to Zóra herself, perhaps, there was a touch of vanity as well as gratification in her mind, for she did not take off the grand clothes immediately; and old Mamoolla came and peered at her all over, and went and lit another lamp; and the secretary's wife came and looked also, and cried aloud her congratulations in wonder; but she was jealous and envious in her heart, and I am afraid her husband had much to bear in her accusations of idleness, in that he was not so good an exorcist as the venerable old Dervish. "Those people get money by their work," said the dame, with a sneer. "The girl has presents worth hundreds of rupees; when wilt thou give me a gold neck ring and bracelet, or a sari like hers? And who knows what the old Syud has got besides. Touba! Touba! Thou a Syud, and a man of letters, shouldst be able to do as much as he."

The secretary did not vouchsafe a reply. He had been looking at Zóra's glorious eyes and expressive face all the evening, as they sat around the ailing child, and I think that more beautiful

visions than his wife's shrewish face excluded thought of her more than she would have liked.

The fame of the old Dervish's cure, or, as some now called him, the Hukeems, or Physician, spread not only through the town but through the country, and applicants for relief thronged upon him, making offerings which were sometimes considerable; but from most people he would take nothing; yet to Zóra's perception they were growing rich, and, as Abba said, with a look of satisfaction, there was enough to make the Turreequt easy; and, after that, to settle in some pleasant place and to become a Wallee, or saint, at whose tomb people should come and pray

CHAPTER IX.

THE SYUD TAKES TWO DEGREES IN HIS TURREEQUT.

FOR a few days there was nothing more to be done. The Rajah's child was well, and her complexion was already changed from the grey, livid colour which had before existed to a healthy ruddy tint, and she slept without waking. Every day the old Dervish visited her; and the child, now fearless, nestled in his lap. What if she were a Beydur! The haunted rooms had been freed of evil spirits; and by way of giving assurance to all, especially to the servants, the family went and slept there without being disturbed. A packet of medicines was made up for the Rajah by the old man and Zóra, and the use of them explained. Finally, the day arrived on which they must depart. The oorus or anniversary, of the Saint Syud Sofy Surmust would take place on the third day; and among the crowds present, it would be difficult to find lodgings. Finally, the Rajah proposed that his secretary should attend the old man, and see him safely through the festival. "And," added that worthy person, "if your friend the Kazee of Kembavee is there, so much the better." Then the presents to the old Syud were brought from the treasury; and the seals, as they

had been made on them, were inspected by the Rajah and broken, and the list that had been placed inside read out. It was, indeed, a princely gift, suited to the age and holy profession of the recipient; and with a bag of five hundred rupees the list closed.

"Nay, but I protest against this," said the old man, earnestly. "I exercise my art not for gain; but for the love of God and His name."

"Well," replied the Rajah, "if thou wilt, give it away in charity. A gift cannot be recalled; and so I pray thee take it for the remembrance of one who, though he is only a Beydur, can at least prove grateful."

And after this no more objection was made; it would have been an insult. Then, as the Syud rose, the Rajah rose also, and went and touched the dear old man's feet; and the Ranees were called and did the same; and the child, with many tears, hung about his neck, and her hands wandered over his face; and it was with difficulty that he and Zóra got away, under the blessings showered upon them. But all was finished, and the secretary's wife had obtained the dearest wish of her life, and drank a charm, which was washed from the paper on which it had been written into a silver cup filled with water, in entire faith in its efficacy. And now the Turreequt awaited them at Sugger, and they must go. The money that had been given them was converted into the small gold coin called hoons, which were

then in circulation, and could easily be carried; and Wednesday being the proper day for proceeding northwards, according to the Rujub-ool-Ghyb, and a fortunate conjunction of planets to boot, they took leave of their hostess and departed. The day before, when they had gone to pay their respects to the Rajah, he said he had provided two palanquins for the old Dervish and Zóra; and though this interfered with the vow to walk the whole distance, yet it had become evident to Zóra that her grandfather's life would be endangered by fatigue; and, after much remonstrance, she agreed to a compromise, that on approaching Sugger or any other town he should alight from his conveyance, spread a sheet on the ground before him, sing the invocation, and await the alms of the passers by. So with Ahmed and Mamoolla mounted on their ponies, the baggage animals loaded and led behind, a guard sent by the Rajah, and the secretary mounted on a palfrey of his own, the little procession passed out of the gate of Wakin-Keyra amid the blessings and prayers of a crowd which had assembled there.

The road to Sugger lay through some low rocky hills for a while, and, passing through a natural gap in them, the valley and town of Sugger came in sight, at the distance of a few miles; a pretty scene, for the town seemed embosomed in trees; several considerable tanks for irrigation lay blue and still in the hollow, and the bright green rice-fields below them formed a pleasant and

remarkable feature in the landscape; while the newly-erected mausoleum of Ankoos Khan, a late Minister of Beejapoor, rose in an imposing mass above all. To the right were high, rocky hills, which seemed to increase in height till they broke suddenly into the plain a few miles to the east, and were composed of rocks like those so vividly remembered by Zóra at Juldroog, piled on each other in huge masses. On the north side of the valley was a still higher and more massive range, which the secretary pointed out to her as he rode by the side of her palanquin, and told her that the great fortress of Shahpoor occupied a portion of it. All over the valley between the two ranges the land was well cultivated, and the early crops were now ripening, while others were still green. To Zóra, who had never seen such a sight before, the whole valley appeared a perfect paradise; and, indeed, under the glowing sunlight, it was no doubt very beautiful.

A strange feature in the latter portion of their journey was the number of touters who now met them, crying the praises of the rooms they had to let; and these soon increased to a crowd. The occurrence of the annual festival was a source of profit to all in the town, and everyone who had even a vacant cowshed to offer, cleaned it out and proclaimed it a palace. Lodgings had, however, already been provided; and the Moolla of the great mosque hearing from his friend, the Kazee of Kembavee, of the proposed visit of the old Dervish and Zóra, had kindly offered such accom-

modation as his house afforded. Now, as they approached the town the procession halted, and the arrangement Zóra had proposed was carried out. Near the great mausoleum of Ankoos Khan was a grassy bank shaded by a large tree, and they sat down and sang the invocation, while on the sheet spread out cowries and copper coins soon began to rattle as they fell; and the result, as the old Dervish declared, as he stroked his long beard, was evidence of the goodness of the Almighty. "There will be many poor folks at the evening prayer, child," he said to Zóra, "and thou art to distribute all there is to them." Then, after a while, he rose, and led by Zóra, for he would allow no one else to perform this office, he walked slowly on.

The Bazar, and indeed the whole of the town, was full of people; and the sight of the venerable old man, led by his beautiful grandchild, created no little excitement. "Who is the holy Dervish?" cried some. "We welcome your holiness to our town in the name of His Highness the Prophet and Sofy Surmust, on whom be peace!" cried a body of Mussulman weavers, all with long beards as though they were Dervishes. "That is the holy saint who cast out devils at Wakin-Keyra," cried others; "may he live a hundred years! And that is his grandchild, who leads him everywhere, bless her sweet face!" And it was, indeed, sweet to look upon.

Zóra had had a green dress made for herself at Wakin-Keyra,

and this she wore that day. It was a tunic like that of a man, with loose skirts. She wore a turban of green muslin, into which her beautiful hair was gathered and bound up. Her loose trousers were also green, and the scarf which was tied round her waist, crossed over her head; so that, if needful, she could at any time conceal her face. Women, as she passed them, held out their children to her, and, stretching out their own hands, kissed the tips of their fingers, or cracked their knuckles against their temples. "God defend thee from evil glances, holy one," cried some. "Ah! she has taken the vows of a Syudanee," said others, "and is not ashamed." Ashamed! no, indeed. Zóra seemed triumphant. She, too, had her humble place in the Turreequt, and, God willing, would go on with it, leading her beloved grandfather to the last. No wonder she was admired, nay, almost reverenced, as, with a firm, confident step, and a look of modest reliance in her great brown eyes, she passed through the thronged street. Even the soldiers who were lounging about respected her, rose at her approach, and saluted her humbly. Thus they passed on till they were near the mosque, where their friend the Kazee awaited them, attended by their host the Moolla; and they were led into the great court of the mosque, and then through a door into a private enclosure, which was always kept, as the Moolla told them, for visitors of distinction; and Zóra at once saw that there was ample room and privacy for all. While behind was

a yard which would contain their ponies, Ahmed, and the men they had hired to accompany them.

Presently the call to afternoon prayer was sung from the roof of the mosque, and crowds began to assemble—Fakeers, weavers, soldiers, and many strangers. The Kazee had requested the old Dervish to give a discourse, such as might suit the people assembled, and he had consented; and after prayer was ended, he recited a verse of the Koran, and began his sermon on the Turreequt, or path of salvation. Never had such a discourse been heard in that mosque. It seemed as if, translated by his enthusiasm above the ordinary life and occupations of men, as indeed by his blindness and reverential spirit he had been for so many years, the Dervish was like one inspired, and his eloquence, so pathetic, so practical, and so truly fitting his subject, powerfully affected his audience, and many groaned, many wept; and at the close of the address all his hearers crowded round him to interchange the salutation of peace which is exchanged among Mussulman worshippers.

Thenceforward the afternoon services at the mosque were attended by crowds; and when she led her grandfather to his apartment, to take rest, Zóra could not help exclaiming, in ardent tones of love and admiration, "Oh, Abba! I never heard thee speak as thou hast done to-day. May the Lord bless and sustain thee to make the people like thyself." But he

could not reply; his own heart appeared too full for words. That evening, too, he performed his vow of begging, and people said, "That is the Dervish who preached to-day, and his child; they have a vow to beg." And so no one molested them as they sang their invocations; and Zóra carried her wallet on her arm, receiving alms from those who heard her sweet thrilling voice, whether they were Mussulmans or Hindoos.

But it was necessary to choose which association of Fakeers the old man should belong to. What had he to hope for in the world? What had Zóra? Her religious enthusiasm had been aroused, and she, too, would fain have made an open profession of her faith, but her grandfather objected. "It is not in thy horoscope, child," he said, as she urged him to consent with sobs and tears. "In that are children, and the rank thou art entitled to. These cannot come through profession as a Fakeer; and shall we, who have given ourselves up to the guidance of the Lord, dare to misinterpret His will? Be patient, then, my child, and fear not, for I believe that what will come to thee will come out of thy faith and thy endurance." So she was silent, and wept no more; but, instead, dwelt upon his form whom she had once watched, and which seemed to rise to her mental vision more vividly than ever.

It was, however, necessary to decide this serious question of election. Our old Dervish, by his first and subsequent discourses, had given proof of his fitness for any grade, even the highest one

of Mushâekh, beyond which only remained that of Wallee, or saint, and, in concert with his friends, a whole day was spent in deliberation on the subject. At Sugger were assembled representatives of all the hundreds of sects of Fakeers existing in the country, of which we spare the reader the enumeration of, to him or her, unpronounceable names. There were some who sung odes and hymns, some who danced, some who played instruments; many who led lewd, riotous lives, and pretended to do miracles; others who walked through thorns and danced on hot embers, or took red-hot chains or ploughshares in their hands, and, dipping them in powdered resin, wiped off the blaze with naked hands. Some kept bears, or tigers, or monkeys, which they had tamed and taught to perform ingenious tricks; others had tame snakes living in their sleeves or in the breasts of their tunics. Again, there were others who seared their tongues with hot wires, or scored their arms or breasts till the blood flowed, or put live scorpions into their mouths.

In short, if I, the writer of this chronicle, enumerated all the sects and their particular professions and means of getting their livelihood, my readers would see plainly, as the old Dervish did, that these were but contrivances to get money, or to lead dissolute lives under the pretence of a godly vow. "And what," he said, "could a quilted cap and an iron rod like the Kullundurs, or black turbans and clothes like the devotees of Shah

Zinda Mudar, signify as aids to the Turreequt?" He therefore said to his friends,—

"All these divisions of Fakeers are delusions, my brothers, and many of them are delusions of Satan, and work for the ruin of souls. My own faith is simple, and my course of life is also simple. Whatever I have been able to do, either in the relief of the sick or the casting out of evil spirits, I have effected under the invocation of the noble Saint Peer-i-Dustugeer, the Prince Syud Abd-ool-Qadir, on whom be peace! Should there be any professors of his doctrine or ceremonies in this great assemblage, I pray ye, friends, bring him or them to me, that I may make a public profession, and be received into the sect as a Moorsheed (scholar, or novice). I shall henceforward be a Fakeer, and fight for the faith under the banners of my chosen Lord."

The Moolla of the mosque, the secretary, and the Kazee, who had each become devotees of other sects, would fain have had the old man join that which they themselves had professed; but after much earnest and learned discussion they could not succeed in weakening their guest's resolution, and they let him have his way. A professor of the Qadirea doctrines was soon found, who was a respectable and learned man from Golconda, who had taken the degree already, and, in conjunction with our old friend, a fitting day was soon named and fixed. What a pleasure, too, it was to receive visits from the officers of the troops stationed

at Sugger, who were mostly Dekhanies! How pleasant to hear the old surnames, which he had not heard for years! For here were Bylmees, Alla-ool-Moolks, Siah-poshas—white standards, black sunshades—and many others, whose familiar war cries he had heard in the field. And the commander had the Akhbars, or news-letters of Beejapoor, and left them for Zóra to read to her grandfather.

How pleasant it was to hear of old names, and of the King's progress against the armies of Ahmednugger; watching every movement of the enemy, yet not striking a blow; but striving to bring them to reason. Then in one of the latest, the arrival of Abbas Khan was mentioned, and the accusation against him and the trial by ordeal, and the praises of the young man and description of his noble bearing before the Queen, a stripling as he appeared before a giant, were, you may be sure, dear reader, read by Zóra with feelings of exultation she could not repress. She even set to work and copied the whole passage. Then also Meeah's appointment to command the reinforcement for the King, and his march out of the city; and that Runga Naik accompanied him. So he was well, Zóra thought, with glistening eyes and beating heart, and has cleared himself before all, even his Queen. I think her grandfather was too much bound up in his Turreequt to care much about the Beejapoor news, though he appeared to rejoice at Abbas Khan's victory; but in the Akhbar

of the next day, in which the discovery of Osman Beg's treason was detailed, and read by Zóra with emotion, and that he would be tried before the Queen, the old man suddenly burst out into an unexpected display of feeling. Hitherto he had not complained of the outrage to Zóra, except at first, but now he was passionately excited. "Spare me, O Lord!" he cried, raising his hands to heaven. "Spare me to help thy justice before men; then Thou wilt give me tongue to speak his shame who purposed shame to my child—yea, shame and insult. Ameen! Ameen!" and again he relapsed into silence. "Thou dost not say Ameen, girl," he said at length.

"The Lord, who forgives our sins, can do as He wills, Abba, in this matter, and forgive if it be good," replied Zóra, gravely. "Yet I can say in truth Ameen and Ameen to whatever He willeth. Doubt not, Abba, that truth will be declared, for so my heart tells me daily, and that this our journey is the way to its attainment."

He was again silent for awhile, and then said, "And hast thou forgiven him, Zóra?"

"I have forgiven him," she replied, humbly. "He can do me no harm; and, under the protection of the Lord, he did me none. For what he purposed to do, Alla will judge."

"And where didst thou learn this, child?"

"From your own lips, Abba," she said, humbly; and going to

him, bent down and kissed his hands and his feet. "From your own lips, Abba. Dost thou think I forget thy teaching, when all who hear remember it?"

"I am rebuked, Zóra, and justly so. If I do not what I bid others do, of what use is this Turreequt? Let him be mentioned no more between us. No, he cannot harm thee now; and let the Lord deal with him as He pleaseth;" and the old man lay down and fell asleep.

Everything had been arranged as to the initiation. The Mushâekh from Golconda, who was a learned and wealthy man, who lived in an ancient saint's garden and shrine near that fort, and was much respected by the King, had been one of the audience when the first of the Dervish's sermons was preached, and he had continued his visits to the mosque every day, and after the last he was brought into the old man's apartments, and introduced to him. He had believed that the venerable preacher was already a Mushâekh of high degree, and was considerably surprised by his request to be now allowed to enter the order, and fixed the second day afterwards for the ceremony, giving a detail of what would be needful. And we will not say what culinary preparations were made under old Mamoolla and a staff of cooks, who were hired and put under her orders; but there were sundry pilaos, birianees, kabobs, and other savoury and delicate viands.

The cooking, which was for over a hundred Fakeers of all

denominations, had begun early in the morning, and before noon the Mushâekh arrived, accompanied by his friends, and took his seat in the mosque. Then our old Dervish came forth, and many wild-looking Fakeers, who had assembled, were led by the Kazee and the secretary, and being presented to the holy man, they placed their hands on his head and bade him welcome. Being asked whether his choice of the Saint Peer-i-Dustugeer was a true one, the old man produced a diploma he had received in Tunis, where he had become a disciple, and which had been sealed with the seals of eminent men. This the Mushâekh put to his forehead and eyes, and kissed it; and it was handed round for the edification of all who were present; and no other certificate of the performance of the first ceremony being needful, the admission to the second was proceeded with.

Strictly speaking it would have been advisable to have had all the hair shaved from the old man's head, beard, eyebrows, and chest; but because of his age this was dispensed with, and a few hairs were cut from each with a pair of scissors, and his nails pared. Then he was bathed carefully, and his new garments, carried before him, accompanied by chaunts from the Fakeers, were given to him one by one, and certain texts of the Koran repeated. Lastly, his crown, or cap, which had been beautifully embroidered by Zóra, was placed on his head. It was of green velvet, and his new tunic was of green muslin, with a green scarf over all. After that he

had to recite the four forms of belief. He was asked three times whether he acknowledged the Mushâekh his spiritual leader and guide, and the whole of the assembly as brethren, and he replied he did. Whereupon a loud shout arose that he was welcome in the name of all the saints, each man calling out that of his own.

After that the crown, which had been removed, was solemnly put on his head again; his grave cloth was hung about his neck with spices and perfumes; a new loongee, or waist cloth, was put on, and a round piece of mother of pearl tied round his neck. When all this was completed, the Mushâekh took several sips out of a cup of sherbet, handing it to the old man, who drank it all, while the Mushâekh at the same time bestowed the new name which he was to bear hereafter. This was Luteef Shah, or King, every properly elected Fakeer bearing that title; and when the new name was pronounced, every one greeted it with a joyous shout. Then the feast began, which had been so liberally provided, that hundreds of the poor of the town were satisfied as well as the Fakeers, and the installation of Luteef Shah was long remembered.

"When you have remained three days in your present grade," said the Mushâekh, "we will raise you to our own, for we are more in number here than is needed by the order; but it will be a

simple matter in comparison with this, and confined to our degree alone." We may, however, spare the reader the detail of these ceremonies, which were, in truth, simple enough. They all paid a quiet visit to the tomb of Sofy Surmust, which is a short distance to the north of Sugger, and is a most unpretending earthen mound, white-washed; and a carpet being spread, the head Mushâekh delivered a short address to the old man, requiring him not only to repeat the confession of faith, but confess all the sins of his life to be known to God, and to declare in the presence of the Almighty and that assembly that they would never again be repeated.

After this had been done, the instructor repeated all the names of the chiefs of the sect as they had descended from the founder and inherited; and a copy of this, which is called "Shujra," was given to the novice, who was asked whether he acknowledged. A few gold pieces, as part of the ceremony, were presented to the Moorsheed, for the old Dervish was still rich; and the sale of Zóra's pretty caps, drawers-strings, bodices, and other articles, had produced much more than she anticipated, and the evening collection more than sufficed for their maintenance. In any case they had still enough to bear the heavier expenses at Gulburgah, for the highest order of all, which the old Dervish, under his new title of Luteef Shah, was determined to attain from the descendant of the most celebrated saint in the Dekhan, Syud Geesoo Duraz,

the lineal descendant of the original Wallee, who had come from Northern India years ago, and become the spiritual leader of the Moslems' Bahmuny Kings.

"I am going there myself," said his new friend, "for the Syud is a great man, and what is more, a truly devout man, which some of his race have not been. He will welcome you warmly, I know, for he is, besides being my superior in a religious sense, my truly loved and intimate friend. I think he will not object, and I have met with none so worthy of the highest honour as yourself. The representatives of the Saint Syud Abd-ool-Qadir, of Oodgeer, and of Sheykh Fureed, of Gooty, and perhaps others, will be present, who knows? The anniversary at Gulburgah is a very world of religious zeal, where, if I mistake not, your daily discourses in the mosque will be attended with the best results; you had better therefore come with me, for my hareem is with me, and your child may need both society and protection. We are well guarded, too, for your kind Sovereign sent soldiers with me, who are enough to protect us both."

The proposal was a welcome one, and, after explaining the vow he had made to beg his way to his destination, wherever that might chance to be, our old friend finally agreed. It was impossible for him to walk long stages day after day, but he could at least do as he had done when he and Zóra entered Sugger. "Yes," he said, "the Lord carries us on, and finds new friends

and protectors as we go; we desire He will lead us to some resting-place, where, like our friends from Golconda, we may find peace."

As to Zóra, she was supremely happy. The wife of the Mushâekh who had performed the ceremonies was a comparatively young woman, related to the Saint of Ḳullianee, a man of the highest temporal and religious distinction. She had heard of Zóra through her own women, and welcomed the girl kindly. Zóra had gone to her in her Syud's dress at first, and was shy, as she always was; but when her Abba was in the mosque, and when she could gain time, she ran across the street to the Mushâekh's lodgings, and soon became intimate with her; nor was it the less pleasure to the lady that during the journey onwards she should have so pleasant a companion.

Gulburgah lay to the north, and, therefore, the day of the Rujub-ool-Ghyb was again Wednesday. Before that, however, a curious scene occurred between the secretary and her grandfather, which Zóra, who was seated in the inner chamber of the house, working diligently to complete an order for some new caps, which she had to finish before she left, overheard involuntarily. The worthy secretary was speaking with her grandfather on the subject of the Turreequt generally, and, indeed, as was his wont, using gross flattery, which the old man always detested, and checked sometimes in not very mild language.

"If I were the blessed messenger of the Lord Himself you could not flatter me more," said the old man, roused out of his ordinary submission to such inflictions. "I pray you cease, and be silent, as it behoves a modest man like you to do, Meer Sahib. If you want to pray, why not step into the mosque, and offer your prayers to the Most High?"

"But your holiness can assist me in my desire. You can intercede for me, and without you my prayers will gain no favour."

"I object to two things in your speech, Meer Sahib. First, that I should be called your holiness, which is a title for Wallees and Owleas only; and secondly, to knowing aught of your prayers and desires, which I cannot assist."

"But you can assist them," persisted the secretary. "Huzrut, Huzrut, I am beside myself; unless you help me I shall go mad."

"Now, God help thee, poor man," returned our friend. "Why shouldst thou go mad? Art thou poor, I cannot help thee; art thou rich, pray Alla to send thee grace to spend it. Thou hast no children! Well, I have given thy wife a powerful charm, and I pray it may be efficacious; but still, once more, if any fair one hath captivated thee, go to the gipsies, and others who sell charms, and they will take thy riches for them; but come not to me, my friend, for in that case thou wilt become my enemy."

"Oh! say not so Huzrut; say not so," said the man, prostra-

ting himself. "We are alone, and I fear, yet I would conceal nothing. I love Zóra-bee, your grandchild, and I cannot live without her. Pity me, and grant my prayer. See, I eat dust, I cast it on my head; I am your supplicant, and our friend the Kazee is here, and we could at least be betrothed, and I would follow you till——"

Now, while Zóra within was bursting with suppressed laughter at seeing the little fat secretary sprawling on the ground before her grandfather, she saw too, through the screen, ominous signs of a storm gathering upon the dear old man's face; nor was it long before it broke.

"Thou, Meer Sahib, thou, to ask for the only child of one who is vowed to God. Hast thou considered her birth, her position, and thine own? Hast thou no perception of thine own meanness? Oh, good man, verily thou hast eaten dirt, much dirt, and I feel the helplessness of age and blindness to be a bar against thy chastisement for the insult. Hast thou said aught to her? Get up and speak!"

"I—I—I. No—no. I could not be so rude; but if thou wilt permit me, I will send a vakeel to her to-morrow."

"Thou shalt do no such thing; she can tell thee herself. She hath seen thee often, and is not afraid of thee. And thou hast another wife, O mean blockhead! Zóra! Zóra!" he shouted, "come hither. God forgive me if I have been rough with him,"

he continued, as Zóra approached the screen hanging across the door, and said, "I am here, Abba, but I must stay within."

"Nay, I cannot tell thee," said the old man; "it is too ludicrous. Let the Meer Sahib speak for himself." And without further ado, the secretary got up, adjusted his turban, which had become awry, pressed his waist-belt down on his hips, twisted up his moustachios, and, in short, improved his appearance as much as was possible, and began to address the girl in the most high-flown language he could command. He quoted line upon line of Persian poetry, comparing her to the rose and himself to a nightingale. He discoursed on the loves of Joseph and Zuleeka, Potiphar's wife, of Abraham and Zuppoora, and would have proceeded after the same fashion, but the old man burst into a peal of laughter so hearty that the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Enough, enough!" he cried, "O Meer Sahib; I am not used to laughter, and thy speech is irresistible. What sayest thou, Zóra, wilt thou have this jewel among secretaries, whose tongue is sweet as honey, to be thy husband, and share his love with the lady we have left?"

"He is very kind to me," said Zóra, with a mischievous tone of raillery in her voice. "Very kind, and I am utterly unworthy of him. Should so great a man as a Rajah's secretary stoop to a Fakeer's granddaughter? Touba! Touba! Fie! Fie! And what would his wife say?" And Zóra could hold out no longer, but laughed in her turn.

"Come, Meer Sahib," said the old man, "let us be friends again, and forget this folly. Return to thine own wife and comfort her. Thou knowest thy life would not be pleasant if she heard of this. Go, now, lest others tell her. Go, and God's peace be with thee, and my blessing, though it is little worth. Go."

So the poor man departed not a little chagrined. But there is an old proverb, that men with small round heads, and thin, long beards, do foolish things, and in this case, at all events, there was no error.

Zóra was coming in to speak to her grandfather when the Kazee entered the court. "What have you been saying to the Meer Sahib, Huzrut? I met him in the street crying. I think I can guess; but no matter."

"What did he tell you?" asked the old man.

"Well, that my services might be required, and I was not to return home."

"Indeed! It is a strange conceit," returned the other, and the conversation passed into other subjects. They were to set out on the morrow, and it had been arranged to travel by Shahpoor and Gogi; for when the old Syud had heard that that town was so near, he could not resist the opportunity of paying his devotions at the tombs of the Kings he had served; and in the morning the whole party mustered by the mosque and set out on their way northwards. Next day he would be at Almella. Would anyone be alive who could recognise their once prosperous master?

CHAPTER X.

BY THE WAY.

AT the gate of the thriving town of Shahpoor, a few miles distant, they were met by the Governor of the fort, an officer of the Beejapoor Government, and pressed to stay to dinner and such entertainment as he could provide in the evening; and they consented, and an excellent house was placed at their disposal. The town lay at the north-east corner of the great mass of hills which Zóra had seen from the pass by which they had entered the valley of Sugger; and the curious fort, surmounting enormous bare masses of granite rock, stood out with wonderful effect against the sky. Groups of soldiers appeared on the bastions; the Royal flag of Beejapoor waved from the citadel, which contained the excellent house of the Killadar, or commander, and it was evident the place held a numerous garrison. Shahpoor had been originally built by the Bahmuny Kings of Gulburgah, and contains many of their inscriptions; and being a natural position of great strength, in fact, impregnable, it served at once as a frontier fort and to keep the Beydur population in check. There was a nautch in the evening, at which our friends

excused themselves on account of their religious duties; and the long wide streets of the town being level and well kept, Zóra and her grandfather had no difficulty in following their hitherto practised vocation; and, as before, the invocations were sung, and the wallet, now a consecrated one, carried from one end of the town to the other.

The day following, they all went on together to Gogí, where the mausoleum of the earlier Beejapoor Kings was situated. They found it a thriving place, full of weavers, and the station of a large body of cavalry, on account of the excellent forage with which the neighbourhood abounded; and though by far the greater part were absent, there were enough to form an imposing force, which received the holy men as they arrived. Very interesting to them was the cemetery of the great Kings, and the college attached to it, which was in daily use.* It consists of one large interior, with

* The college and cemetery are still perfect, but the former is used no longer, and is forsaken except at the anniversaries of the several deaths, when prayers are said in it. The tombs of the Kings are covered by printed cotton cloths, which are renewed annually. Certain families of weavers and printers in the town, descendants of the original executers of these articles, still contribute them, and are paid by the proceeds of certain lands and rice fields with which the tombs were endowed at first, and certain payments from the Customs dues; and to the last the Rajahs of Shorapoor were the hereditary almoners of this bounty, and disbursed it regularly on every anniversary either in person or by deputy. Gogi now belongs to the Government of His Highness the Nizam, and it may be hoped that the ancient custom has not been discontinued, and that the interesting and beautiful remains have been kept in repair.

chapels at the junction of the sides of the octagon; and the architecture of this, as well as the gateway and front of the building, is, perhaps, the finest specimen of florid Gothic in the Dekhan, built entirely of black basalt, exquisitely ornamented and finished. One by one the graves of the Kings behind were shown to them by the attendant priests, and these, with the tombs of their wives and some dependants, occupy a considerable area enclosed by a wall. When they came to that of Ibrahim Adil Shah, under whom our old friend had served, he kneeled down beside it and began to sob and beat his breast. Zóra tried to soothe him, for not, even as yet, knowing his history, she feared he had been taken suddenly ill, and would fain have run for medicine; but he put his hand on her arm, and said—

"I have not forgotten what you said to me when I called for vengeance upon Osman Beg. Here lies one who did me injury more than thou knowest, Zóra; at the remembrance of which all my worst passions rise into active being. And yet I thank Thee, O hearer of prayer," he continued, reverently raising his turban, "that Thou enablest me to say here I do forgive thee, O King and Royal master, and pray thou mayest have been accepted through His grace for all the good works thou didst to thousands. Peace be with thee, and the blessings of the Most High!"

"What was he to thee, Abba?" asked Zóra, in wonder. "The attendant tells me that there have been many Kings since he died."

"What he was to me, child, thou wilt know hereafter, perhaps soon now; but no matter! In the great King Ibrahim I had a friend who loved me. Since him there have been two Kings, and the present one, whom I may be spared to see, bears his name. And yet, O once beloved master, my heart is even now with thee in the grave, where I must follow thee; and I bless Thee, O my Lord, that I have learned to forgive even through my child."

On the western side of the cemetery was the embankment of an irrigation lake of some considerable area, and the rain having fallen plentifully, it was full of water. Then they went and sat by it, and the soft south-west wind brought the tiny waves to their feet, and sighed in the noble trees which shaded the cemetery and the college. They had brought a slight refection with them, and ate it together, while the old Dervish discoursed on the mysteries of holiness, or told many a tale of the past, when he, in King Ibrahim's suite, had halted for the day and performed ceremonies at the tombs of his ancestors, while the ground for the college was being measured and the architect explained the work he proposed to undertake. They attended the afternoon prayer in the college, which was filled to overflowing with the people and soldiers from the town; and our old friend addressed them in one of his loving, persuasive sermons, in which, perhaps from the unlooked-for occurrences of the day, he was even more eloquent than ever.

The Fatehas at the Kings' tombs could not be made ready that day, and as their companions had no objection, but, indeed, the contrary, they remained and formed a little procession to the cemetery, spending a day of quiet peace, such as Zóra thoroughly enjoyed. She used to say long afterwards, when she was an old woman, that her second day at Gogi was one of the happiest of her life, because one of the most thoughtful and impressive; and how sweet it had been to her to find her beloved grandfather's mind softening to an habitual cheerfulness and submission. "Truly," as he said constantly to her, "truly, child, I feel as if the Lord were leading me in this Turreequt, and that, too, by means of thee, O beloved! from the first."

The country from Gogi to Gulburgah is uninteresting, but very fertile and well cultivated, and for some portion of their first march many of the Royal cavalry and townspeople escorted them; for the fame of our old friend had gone before him, and all were desirous of paying him honour and receiving his blessing. Crossing the Bheema river by the ferry at Ferozabad, Zóra saw the palace fort of the famous King Feroze Shah, situated on a high bank of the river above one of its long deep reaches. But it is now only a ruin, and was even then in poor condition; and towards the close of the following day the minarets and domes of the holy city of Gulburgah were in sight, and it was quickly reached.

Nothing could persuade our old friend that it should be treated

like an ordinary town. His heart was full of reverence and thankfulness at having reached the end of his pilgrimage in safety and honour, and his new friend was equally reverential. So within a mile of the entrance gate they dismounted from their litters and performed a prostration ceremony by the wayside, and walked on together, Zóra, as was her wont, dressed in her pilgrim's dress, leading her grandfather. Near the gate the old man had his sheet spread for alms, and it was not till the time for evening prayer was nigh that he arose and, guided by one of the Mushàekh's servants, followed his friend to the final place of destination, which was in a suburb which belonged to the spiritual Prince of the place, the descendant of the Geesoo Duráz family, who reigned. The noise and bustle of the crowded Bazar was therefore avoided.

Zóra, whose ideas of a city were of the most limited practical nature, and to whom Sugger, Shahpoor, and Gogi had appeared immense, was fairly confounded when, in company with her new friend, they ascended to the terrace of the house which had been assigned to them by the Prince. Before them were the fine mausoleums and domes of the original Geesoo Duráz, and the cemeteries attached to them, the Prince's palace and pretty gardens, with their fine rows of cyprus trees. In the middle distance the massive group of the mausoleums of the Bahmuny Kings, standing apart on an elevated piece of ground, and forming

a picturesque group, with the still populous city lying at their feet; while to the left was the strong fort, with its regular fortifications, and beyond a considerable artificial lake, which the King Feroze, the merry Monarch of Dekhan history, had had constructed for his aquatic amusements.

Gulburgah was, however, an ancient city, for when Zuffir Khan, the Viceroy of the then Emperor of Dehly, Mahomed Toghluk, founded the Bahmuny dynasty in A.D. 1347, the old Hindoo city was selected by him as his capital in the Dekhan, and continued to be so until, in 1435, nearly a century afterwards, a new city was built at Beeder, which was finally adopted as the seat of the Royal Government. During a hundred years of prosperity, however, under the early portion of the dynasty, Gulburgah had become a rich and thriving city. It was the mart for local produce and importations from the coast. Merchants of Arabia and Persia, nay, of Turkey and the Levant, resided there, and the courts of the early Bahmunies were magnificent and wealthy. Thus the city was ornamented with many public buildings, caravanseras, and mosques, almshouses, hospitals, and the like, and the fort constructed there was by far the strongest and most regular in the Dekhan; and within it the great mosque, which was to have been the exact counterpart of that at Cordova, in Spain, was begun, and roofed in; but never completed.

All these principal edifices are still extant, but much decayed and ruined. King Feroze's once superb palaces in the fort are masses of shapeless ruins; but the mosque is as it was left by the masons and architect, and could be finished were there anyone to undertake it, and the fort is perfect. The mosques and other buildings in the city are tolerably preserved; but the mausoleums of the once haughty Kings are deserted, except by grazing cattle and goats, which shelter there from the noon-day heat; and no one lives who bestows a lamp and its oil to light at night the interior of these noble edifices.

At the period of the visit of our friends, the city belonged to the kingdom of Beeder, which, after the extinction of the Bahmunies, remained in possession of the capital. Gulburgah was one of the chief cities of the kingdom, and was garrisoned by a large body of its troops to guard the frontier of the Bheema river against the armies of Beejapoor. If not, therefore, equal to its former prosperity, the city was yet in good condition, and the religious and other edifices were in perfect preservation and in constant use.

Nearly three hundred years have elapsed since the time we write of, and Time, the spoiler, has been busy. The city has dwindled to a provincial town; the buildings are extant, but many of them in decay. The tombs of the Kings, so solidly built, are, perhaps, with the fine old fort, the least changed of all, and the

lake below the palace of King Feroze sparkles as brightly as ever in the sun. The only building and premises as perfect now as they were three hundred years ago are the mausoleums of the Geesoo Duráz family, for their possessions have been continued to them, and they live in their old prosperity and religious honour, and the attendance of pilgrims at their shrine is as large now as perhaps it ever was—as devout and as full of faith. But Gulburgah has a new honour never dreamed of, truly, in the dim past. It is now a station of the railway line from Bombay, and from it diverges one branch to Madras and one to Hyderabad—the old capital of the Golconda kingdom.

CHAPTER XI.

SAINTLY HONOURS.

THE sun was just rising as Zóra and her companion, the Mushâekh's wife, looked forth on the splendid scene spread out before them. Thin blue smoke was hanging over the distant portion of the city, veiling the details of terraced houses, minarets, and mosques, and other pretentious buildings, and then passing into the grey distance which melted into blue and violet lines up to the horizon. Nearer objects were more defined, and the mausoleums of the Kings, the fort, and the blue lake, were clear and beautiful as the sun's rays touched the white and glistening surface of the massive domes, the slender spires of the minarets, and the tops of the noble trees which stood around in almost every direction. From a higher elevation the view might have been more complete and extensive, but it would have lost the charm of that lovely combination of objects of all descriptions which their present situation afforded.

Zóra's face was flushed and excited, and her large brown eyes were half filled with tears as she looked around. "Abba cannot see it," she murmured to herself; "but he may have seen it be-

fore, when he was young, and I will ask him; but, oh! it is so beautiful."

"I used, lady," she continued to her new companion, "to think our old grim fort and its rocks beautiful; and the deep ravine, with the cataract, was beautiful, too, only so wild, that they used to make me tremble very often; but this is more soft and loving, and one seems to be wrapped in all around, and to feel it in one's heart. I shall be sorry when we can stay no longer."

"So shall I," returned the lady. "When I was a barren woman, with no hope, my husband brought me here, and the saint blessed me, and my firstborn followed. He is now four years old, and we have come, as we vowed, to return our humble thanks for him, and to pray for his welfare always in the future. When thou hast one like him, Zóra, the only thing thou wilt ever care to look at will be his eyes; and thy time will come, too. If thou hadst a mother, she would have arranged this long ago."

"Perhaps," said Zóra, timidly, a manly face she well remembered rising to her thoughts. "Perhaps; and what is written in my fate will come to pass."

"True, child," returned the lady, "but fate needs help sometimes, though truly before fate contrivance can do but little; still it may be tried. Now, my husband and I have a little plot against you both, and that is to take you with us to Golconda, where our lord the King is, a devout and learned man, who hath great venera-

tion for holy Mushâekhs and Dervishes; and he would be charmed with your grandfather, and would never let him depart; he would give him estates, and he would take the rank that is due to him. What think you? As to yourself, I have the noblest husband for you. He is commander of ever so many horsemen, and holds estates and lands for their maintenance; and so he is very rich, and has a beautiful palace in the fort, and gardens. When I parted with him, he said, laughingly, 'Oh, aunt, bring me the most beautiful woman you can see, for I have had every girl in Golconda inspected, and I love not what I hear of any of them.' I said, 'You are laughing at me, Shere Khan;' but his face changed, and he said, 'I am not; I swear to thee, by Ayesha, that I am entirely in earnest.' And who do I know, or ever saw, but thee, Zóra, who would be worthy of him? Dost thou know how lovely thou art, with that soft curly hair of thine hanging about thy neck, and the ruddy glow in thy fair, sweet face? Did no one ever tell thee how beautiful thou art? Hast thou had no friend in thy young life?"

"Maria used to tell me so," replied Zóra, shyly, "and I used to chide her."

"Maria! Who is Maria? That is a Nazarene name, surely."

"She is a Christian lady, one of God's servants, whom chance sent to us at Juldroog, and she and her brother lived with us."

"And she wanted thee for him, and made thee a Christian?"

"No," said Zóra, gravely, "she did not make me a Christian; and for her to think of me for her brother would have been foolish. He, too, has a vow to God, and could not marry even among his own people. No, she was only a dear friend, and I owe to her all that I know, and all that I can do."

"And where is she now, child?"

"I know not, lady; alas! I know not. She went from us with her brother to Beejapoor, and perhaps has gone on to Goa."

"Thank God!" said the lady; "then there is the better chance of my plan succeeding, and I will ask my husband to apply to your grandfather."

"I know he hath urgent business in Beejapoor, lady, and hath urgent need to see the King; but what it is he never told me, and I know nothing of his life."

"Well, then, as God wills," said the lady; "but if I told Shere Khan of thee, he would follow thee, I know, as long as he could trace thee through the Dekhan."

I will not describe the ceremonies as the travellers paid their devotions at the mausoleum of the departed saints, or their respects to the present reigning incumbent. These were no places for our old friend to display his genius, his eloquence, and his learning. These and the doctrines of his teaching only shone forth in addressing crowds in mosques, and on special occasions, when, as it seemed, inspiration came on him; but one day,

when he was in the large mosque for prayer—it was some minor festival day—and there was a crowd of worshippers, and the Prince was present, he asked leave to deliver the sermon, and the service was thankfully accepted.

As the old man took his place on the upper step of the pulpit, clad in his green dress, and, leaning on his staff, stretched out his arms, a murmur came from the assembly which cheered and excited him; and with a short text on the love of God, his words poured forth in a stream, not in the soft Persian he had adopted of late, but in the rugged Dekhan tongue--which had little of ornament or hyperbole in it—which became a torrent of alternate entreaty, reproach, and assurance, the like of which had never been heard before then by any. There were no sophisms, no mysteries, no display of profound erudition, incomprehensible except to a few; but there was instead instruction on the true Turreequt, the true path of salvation. He pleaded humility before God; charity, pity, and love to God and man; absence of any spiritual arrogance, which was but too prevalent, and of self-conceit and display. He spoke of the softer graces of habitual piety, of truth to man and to God, and of sobriety, patience, and endurance; tenderness in home duties and abroad; in short, attention to all the godly precepts of the book of God's messenger, who had inspired it, as he believed, and enjoined constant thought of the day of judgment, and the trial then of all

profession. Be not offended with me, O Christian reader, for such things can be taught out of the book you have been told to hold in scorn, apart from the mystery and sensual doctrines which are so strangely mingled with them.

When he concluded, and the blessing was delivered, those present did not form into knots, to shake hands and give the salutation of blessing one to another as usual, but, as if by inspiration, shouted, "A saint! a saint! a miracle hath been done, for such words were never heard!" and the Prince was as much excited as any one else, and joined with the rest. Then he called for his own conveyance, which was a nalkee, or sedan chair, with two poles and eight bearers, and our old friend was put into it, and accompanied by the multitude, with torches and blue lights, and firing of guns, for it was now dark, the procession passed on to the palace of the Prince, with cries of "A saint! a Wallee! A miracle, a miracle! Deen, Deen!" burning clouds of incense, throwing handfuls of perfume powder over him, and in every way possible testifying their respect and admiration. Then the Prince took his seat, and called up the dear old man, and in a voice full of emotion said to him, "Come hither, for I salute you in the title of Wallee. Thou hast done a miracle, and the people have seen and acknowledge it, and the Lord accepts it. Listen while I repeat the sacred words of the order. And now drink of this cup of sherbet, which, sipped and

breathed on by me, becomes to thee the sherbet of salvation. Verily, the Lord hath brought thee to the end of the Turreequt, and all ye who are present are witness to this. Ameen! Ameen! It is the Lord's will."

And all cried aloud, with a hoarse shout, "Ameen! Ameen! So be it!"

During this time our old friend had been in a state of which he remembered very little. He recollected, and afterwards repeated, the last words of his sermon, and he remembered his being carried out of the mosque and seated in the nalkee; but of the wild procession, the shouts, the torches and blue lights, and the Prince's address, he recalled very little until he received the cup of cool sherbet, which tasted as if from Paradise itself. Now he was weary of the excitement; and after attempting to utter his thanks he seemed to waver to and fro as he sat, and while the Mushàekh and others supported him he stooped heavily forward and fell to the ground. Then a palanquin was brought, and they carried him to the house where he lodged; and, revived by the fresh air, he was able to alight and walk slowly to his chamber, where Zóra, already made anxious by the sudden rumour that her grandfather had fainted in the great assembly, received him in her arms and laid him down on his cushions. As he had been carried out of the assembly the Prince rose, and cried with uplifted hands before all—

"Pray God that He do not take the saint from us in this his present ecstasy!" And all present cried "Ameen!"

"Pray God that he may live to lead and instruct many." And again they cried "Ameen!"

Then the Prince gave the blessing to all, and they departed; and the precincts of the palace and cemetery soon resumed their quiet, peaceful character, as the stars shone out in the calm and fresh atmosphere of night. And Zóra sat and watched.

For a time her grandfather seemed to sleep calmly; but he became gradually restless and feverish; and from time to time she gave him sips of a sherbet of pomegranates, which he took eagerly. Still he did not appear to recognise her, which much distressed her. It was evident that the events of the evening had been too exciting; and his impassioned sermon, followed by the procession from the mosque, the glare of torch-lights and noise of guns, the clouds of incense smoke, and the final acceptance as a Wallee, had been altogether more than he could bear. From time to time he muttered sentences of the Koran, and seemed to pray. Again he cried aloud, "Karamat! Karamat! A miracle! a miracle!" and tried to lift himself up from his pillow, and wave his arm.

Zóra could not weep, her eyes were dry and burning with anxiety; all she held most dear on earth lay helpless before her, and if he passed away in this ecstasy what would she do,

whither could she go? Who would care for the obscure, friendless girl who did not even know her own origin? But she could not wish they had never come. If Alla pleased to take him, it would be at the crowning point of his earthly life; that which it seemed his only desire to reach, and which had been attained. Her new friend, the Mushâekh's kind wife, came to her and sat with her, and told her freely and compassionately that she must be prepared even for the last; and taking her in her arms, laid her head upon her breast, and told her she would be a mother to her, and she was not to fear; and her husband, who also came, bade her not to fear, for if the Lord took her Abba she would be his and his wife's child thenceforth. But all these alarms of that strange night disappeared by the early morning. For the latter part of it the old man had slept peacefully, like a child; and as the muezzin was crying the invocation to early prayer, and the sentence, "Prayer is better than sleep! Prayer is better than sleep! God is victorious!" he woke, and, to Zóra's infinite joy, sat up with a gentle, smiling face, such as she had not seen for a long time, reminding her of earlier days. Then she assisted him to rise and to perform his devotions; and as he again sat down, she crept to him, and very timidly congratulated him on his new dignity, and the honour he had received.

"Then it was not a dream, child?" he said.

"No, Abba; it was a blessed reality. Zeenat-bee (that was the

name of the Mushâekh's wife) and I were sitting on the terrace above, after evening prayer. The air was so cool and fresh, and the city looked so quiet and peaceful; and suddenly we heard a great hoarse cry arise, and we looked, and blue lights were burned, and the tombs of the Kings flashed out of the dusk brighter than day. Then gradually the crowd appeared, and the tumult was fearful—men struggling with each other to approach the nalkee; and other palanquins and open litters were in front and behind, and we thought it was only the customary honour done to the Prince. But as the procession passed beneath us, and I saw it was thee, O Abba, to whom they were doing honour, I cried with all the rest, and Zeenat and I embraced each other. But when they brought thee, and I looked at thee, and laid thee down, I feared, yea, I feared thy time had come; yet the Lord hath spared thee, and thou art a saint now, one that men may worship without sin."

There was, indeed, no doubt on that score. All the day, the highest in holy rank, the Wallees, the Owleas, the Mushâekhs, doctors learned in the law, and private persons in crowds thronged about the house and its courtyards, and would be content only by the assurance that the new saint would once more preach to them in the mosque, and return thanks to Alla the Most High. And on the third day the old man went in company of the Prince, and took his place, after prayers, on the upper step of the pulpit. To

those present it appeared that he was taller and more dignified than before; but the Wallee's sermon was not the less passionate that day. It affected him less, though it seemed to affect his hearers more; and after it was over, his friend, the Mushaekh, led him about, and he shook hands with many and gave them the blessing. Then the great procession of the Prince's anniversary followed; and though on the grandest scale, accompanied by the troops, and midst the firing of cannon and matchlocks, and blare of sonorous trumpets and horns, with rockets and blue lights continually discharged, yet it had not the excitement of the sudden frenzied rush of the Wallee's recognition, nor the spontaneous enthusiasm of the crowds that had accompanied him; and their journey to the mosque, and subsequent return, were of the same majestic but monotonous character.

As they were all sitting together quietly after they had returned home, Ahmed entered somewhat abruptly, and cried out, "I have heard news. Our King has won a victory, and the King of Ahmednugger was killed." And on being further interrogated, he said he had heard it from some soldiers of Beejapoor, who had a vow to be present at the Prince's procession, and had obtained leave to come the day after the battle, and the dead were being buried.

"Go early," said the old man; "see those men, and bring any that will come to me;" and before mid-day several men came and gave a circumstantial account of the whole action. Abbas Khan

and some Beydurs had been foremost in carrying the guns. The young King of Ahmednugger had charged madly to recover them, but had been shot dead, and the whole army fled to Puraindah and sent ambassadors for peace; and when all was completed, the King would return to Beejapoor—he might even now be on the way.

"This decides me at once, Zóra," said her grandfather. "The Mushâekh's intentions were truly kind, and I will acknowledge them; but thy proper home is with Queen Chand, and till I give thee to her my mind will not rest. After that let it be with us as God willeth. Let us prepare to go."

There was yet one ceremony to perform, which was a solemn leave-taking of the Geesoo Duráz and his fellow spiritual princes who were at the festival, and many others; and Zeenat-bee had to present Zóra to the Prince's wife and other great ladies who would be with her. But poor Zóra's wardrobe, if plentiful for her wants, was not that of a fine lady. The valuable clothes given to her by the Ranee of Wakin-Keyra were of Hindoo form, and, therefore, for the present useless. Her best petticoat was of fine soosi, her best scarf only plain muslin, not over fine; and the new friend looked over the clothes in despair. "None of these will answer," she said; "thou shouldst have satin at least, but it should be cloth of gold."

"I have no better," Zóra said; "I have never known better. What is cloth of gold (kumkhab)?"

"And thou hast never seen it, O simple child? Stay, I see it all now." And she went to her apartments, and her servants returned with her, bringing a bundle. "That is kumkhab," she said to Zóra, shaking out a gorgeous petticoat of the material, "and thou shalt wear that, my child; the grandchild of Luteef Shah Wallee is a princess, and should be clad as one." It was in vain that Zóra protested she ought not to go at all; but there was no escape.

How beautiful she looked when Zeenat-bee came and dressed her. The cloth of gold, the delicate scarf of brocaded muslin, and all beside seemed, indeed, as the natural costume of the sweet girl; and as she entered the assembly of ladies with a modest yet dignified grace, there was not one present who was not struck with her beauty more than they cared to acknowledge. Nor would her kind friend receive the clothes back from her. "If my Shere Khan cannot see thee in them," she said, "you will need them for your Queen, and they will remind thee of me, Zóra. I see thou canst not come with us, for thy grandfather's business with the King is urgent, so I will send thee away, though my heart aches as I do so

And when the time came, for the day of the Rujub-ool-Ghyb was Thursday, for the march southwards, they took leave of all with much emotion; and, after paying for what they had used, the balance was invested in an order by a local banker on Beejapoor, for they had been warned of robbers, gangs of whom

frequented large assemblies like that at Gulburgah, and dogged the footsteps of the returning pilgrims.

Nothing was wanting on the part of the local authorities to do honour to "Luteef Shah Wallee," the humble Syud and Dervish of Juldroog, now the new and accepted saint of the faithful, to be worshipped whenever he might give up his spirit to the angels of death, and henceforth to live in Dekhan history, as many as humble as he had done before. With all his yearning for Beejapoor, he had yet longings after Golconda, and should his petition be rejected, there was at least that refuge to be looked to for Zóra as well as himself. Well! they would soon see, and it could not be many days before he knew his fate. As before, the four baggage ponies were laden by Ahmed; and as the "Geesoo Duráz" insisted on supplying one palanquin and the Governor of the town another, besides a few horse and foot soldiers as far as Almella, where there was a station of Beejapoor troops, they were to travel in comfort and security. But the old man said to Zóra, as she was making her last preparations to depart, "Child, we have been dazzled by our prosperity; may Alla forgive us for having neglected our duty as Fakeers. This we must resume, and therefore keep our old dresses ready for us."

"I have already prepared them," she said; "and whenever thou wilt we will sing the invocation again." Then they set out for Afzulpoor, near the river Bheema.

CHAPTER XII.

DANGER.

THE journey from Gulburgah to Afzulpoor was altogether a pleasant one to the travellers. The morning they left the city was cloudy and cool, and the soft south-west wind blew refreshingly in their faces as they proceeded. The plain, after the stony environs of the city was passed, was rich and fertile, lying on a gentle slope towards the river Bheema, which ran through its broad valley in a tortuous course; but unseen, as the floods had declined, on account of its high, steep banks. The soil was rich and fertile, and luxuriant crops of jowaree, bajree, and other cereals, with pulse, oil seeds, and mustard, now in bright yellow flower, were pleasant to behold, while the air resounded with songs of the cultivators, who were ploughing and otherwise preparing their fields for the autumn sowing of cotton, the larger jowaree, and other products. With the husbandmen it was the busiest time of the year, and to travellers almost the pleasantest, for the rains had given place to occasional light showery weather, which did not affect the roads, while the fleecy clouds tempered the sun's rays, and the climate was hardly warmer than that of an

English summer day. Larks were singing in the air, birds were chirping in every tree, flocks of mynas and paroquets flew cheerily about, and the whole face of nature was joyful. Our old friend was very happy. His excitement was gradually subsiding, and his thoughts were assuming the serenity of his ordinary life. Though he had been raised to the highest spiritual dignity he could receive, yet there was nothing of the zealot or bigot in his nature. If it pleased God, he prayed mentally, to let him remain at Beejapoor, he might by his teaching temper some of the fierce intolerance which he knew used to exist there, and might still continue. He could select some quiet place in which he might make a garden and build a dwelling sufficient for his small requirements; and by services at the great mosque, by public alms, and the donations of the King and nobles of the city, he hoped even to build a small mosque, and establish a school and college, in which he could teach himself, and thus employ his spare time pleasantly and profitably to others. Possibly, also, some quiet, respectable family might propose marriage with Zóra. "They tell me," he murmured to himself, "that she is growing up and is beautiful; but when I asked her whether I should accept the Mushàekh's offer on behalf of his nephew at Golconda, which, indeed, appeared to be an offer in every way worthy of her and of me, she wept, and said, 'No! no! no! Abba. Not away from you; I could not

leave you. But if it be the will of the Lord that thou stay not at Beejapoor, then do with me as thou wilt.' No, she hath no tie to Beejapoor, no expectation there; so let the issue be as the Lord willeth!"

Perhaps, however, the fair Zóra's thoughts were of a different character. Beejapoor had to her always seemed the goal of her desires. Every one around her, even at the old fort, had always spoken of the city as though they belonged to it. She knew that her father had been an officer in its army, and she had gathered enough from her grandfather to believe that he had once served there, though in what capacity she knew not, and she dare not risk the chance of vexing him by asking. He had promised that one day he would tell her all, and she had left the time to his own inclination; now, however, that they were going there, he might break, perhaps, the long and painful silence. But this was not all. Despite of apparent hopelessness, and no knowledge whatever of Abbas Khan's circumstances, her heart was with him always; and from the news of him she had heard at Gulburgah, she appeared to have gained new hope. He was evidently a man of rank; he was near the King, and if her grandfather went to the King, Meeah would hear of her and inquire about her. She had no idea that he could have forgotten her; that the excitement of war, possibly of some other attachment, might have driven her from his thoughts

altogether; or that he might already have been betrothed in his youth. Any or all of such contingencies never occurred to her, and she still believed that she was not forgotten. If it were so, indeed, she would continue as she was, and in the vow of the green dress would be her refuge. Had she not seen others take it at Gulburgah? And Maria, too, she might be there, and be able to direct her. In short, more than ever her goal appeared to be Beejapoor; and though anxious and excited, Zóra was full of hope; which, if it was vague and undefined, still was hope at her heart, that had of late grown more vivid than before.

Mid-day was past, and near a small village there was a garden field, and a well, overshadowed by a huge peepul tree, where the party halted for rest and refreshment. Zóra and Ahmed drew the Syud's small mattress and carpet from the palanquin, and spread them in the shade; and from her stores old Mamoolla produced a cold refection she had prepared at Gulburgah over night. The cool, fresh air and the easy journey had made the old man hungry, and he enjoyed what had been provided very heartily. Zóra had not seen him so cheerful for a long time past, not, indeed, since they had left Juldroog; and it was evident to her that as he neared Beejapoor his hopes grew brighter and clearer; but of what?

"They say, Huzrut," said the leader of the little party of horsemen, "that the ferry-boat at Afzulpoor makes only two trips

across the river on each day; one from this side, when travellers arrive about the third watch, and the other from the further side before noon. Now as we cannot reach the town in time to-day, I have, therefore, sent on two of the horsemen to arrange that the boat should wait till you arrive to-morrow, and to send word by the first basket boat crossing that you are coming, and that lodgings are to be prepared for you in Sinnoor, a considerable village, where you will be very comfortable."

"Then we had better move on, perhaps, sir," returned the old Syud. "I am grateful for your thought of me, and the mid-way stage cannot be far distant now."

"It is only a few miles; there is no need to hurry, my lord," was the reply. "It will be only my infinite regret that I shall not be able to take the whole of my party with you to Beejapoor; but it is difficult for horsemen to cross the river when it is full, and we belong to a different Government; the foot soldiers will, however, accompany you. You can get them relieved at Almella, which is customary."

"Once I am there, sir, I think I can send your men back, for I am known, or—or—used to be."

At Almella, thought Zóra; who can remember him there?

"Zóra," said her grandfather, when they were alone, as Ahmed and the old woman were packing up what had been used, "Zóra, listen to me, child, for it will relieve me to tell you. We have not

preserved our faith with the Lord; we have been exalted by spiritual pride; we seem to be no longer humble Fakeers, but to have changed into princes. Though I cannot see, yet I feel that everyone salutes me. I am called 'Your Holiness,' or 'My Prince,' or 'My Lord,' and this I regret. We have not begged alms as we should have done, and as I vowed to do; and I fear that the Lord will punish me for this great omission."

"True, Abba," said Zóra, laughing, "we have not begged every day, for at Gulburgah you said you could not take me among the crowds, it was not safe; but did I not spread the sheet for you at the gate of the Prince's palace, when the worshippers were entering, and in the cemetery, near the grave of the old saint? And when Ahmed spread it for you in the mosque, was it not always full? and when people came to the house to get charms or amulets, and ask for your blessing, did they not leave alms? Then, grandfather, we have much money, much more than we need, besides the order on Beejapoor. Why should we beg for more? Is it not avaricious to do so? Thou hast only to say Luteef Shah Wallee wants, and riches would be bestowed upon thee. But, O Abba, we do not want them; we were quite happy when we were poor."

"Nay, I am not avaricious," returned the old man, humbly; "but for my breach of vow I fear. Let us resume our wonted habit, Zóra, from this evening where we rest for the night, and

give all we get in the wallet to the poor; and to-morrow, as we wait for the boat, we may as well sing an invocation, and spread the sheet, and we can make a distribution there also."

So it was arranged, and they went out to beg that night, and proceeded next day to Afzulpoor. The people came out in crowds to see the new saint, whose fame had preceded him, for there were many Mussulman weavers and husbandmen at the little town, and some of them had heard the Syud preach, and been witness to the wondrous excitement when he was taken up and carried in procession. They would fain have had him stay with them and preach, for the next day was Friday, the Sabbath; but he could not be persuaded to break his journey, and must go on as had been arranged. When he came to the river side, and his sheet was spread on the green turfy bank, he addressed the people for awhile in his own homely way, and the sheet was rapidly covered with small contributions. Then he took a kind leave of all, and delivered the amount of the collection to the Patell and authorities of the village to be distributed in charity to all the poor, and applied to the expenses of the festival which he knew was at hand. Thus his mind was assured that he had at last done right, and he would continue the custom; and when he landed on the other side, it was with a silent prayer that thenceforth to his destination nothing might interfere with the tenor of his vow.

The men who had been sent forward had been able to make arrangements for our friends, and they were soon comfortable. They had arrived before the time for evening prayer, and their dwelling-place adjoined the mosque, where most of the men and some women of the village had assembled ; and now, too, came an opportunity of saying a few kind words to them all, and the lights were being lighted in the village before they got up, and Zóra led her grandfather back to their apartments. He was quite cheerful then and quite satisfied with what had been done. Zóra and old Mamoolla pressed him to take his dinner, but he laughingly said he had eaten so much of the old woman's good kabobs at the well that he needed no more, and as soon as the cattle had all come in he would go with Zóra, as the streets would be quiet.

Gulburgah during the festival had been full of thieves of every description ; indeed, the place had an evil reputation for robbers at all times. There were not only the ordinary cut-purses and pick-pockets, pilchers, and night prowlers of such gatherings ; but there were Thugs from the neighbouring counties of Allund, Gunjooty, and Kullianee, as well as those who lived in the city itself, carrying on apparently honest trades and occupations, who marked parties for plunder, joined with them as they departed homewards, and slew them when they had gone a little distance with them. For miles, indeed, in every direction were the unhallowed graves of hundreds, and thousands, perhaps, of those

who had been thus decoyed and destroyed. There were, too, Dacoits who attacked the lodgings of pilgrims, or waylaid them on the high roads, and plundered with little regard to consequences. Among the latter were many Jutts and Kaikárees, peaceful-looking people by day, but terrible by night.

Our readers will not have forgotten, perhaps, the attack on the old Syud's house at Kukeyra, with the intent to carry away Zóra; and some of that gang who had escaped, and who lived in small villages somewhat to the south of Almella, were pursuing their usual avocations in the festival; by day selling small prayer-mats to pious Mussulmans, or their women worked bodices, new and old, or made winnowing fans for cleaning rice and other grain; but both by night and by day pursuing their hereditary avocation of thieving. Among these was the boy who had been released by Burma Naik and sent back to his people with the grim notice already recorded. He had seen the old Syud at the public mosque on several occasions; also at the gate of the Prince's palace, when Zóra and her grandfather spread the sheet at night, and had dogged them to their lodging. There nothing could be done, for they were well guarded; but the determination to exact a heavy revenge for their leader's death and the execution of their comrades had not lessened; the only point undecided being how it was to be carried out. Some of the gang were in favour of a sudden attack in a village where the Syud should rest for

the night; but when they found out that the old man was proceeding to Beejapoor, their plan was formed rapidly. They would not rob the holy man; that would be a sin, and bring misfortune on them; but they could carry off Zóra, and give her up to Osman Beg, whom they believed still to be at Juldroog, and demand from him the reward he had promised. Some of the gang had crossed the river by a basket boat early in the morning, with a small litter they had prepared, and which could be easily carried. Several actually crossed in the great ferry-boat (who could have suspected them?), and watched our travellers to their resting-place. Their habit of begging through villages on their journey in the evening was the best opportunity afforded to the robbers' plans, and they were determined to follow them up, even to the gates of Beejapoor, rather than forego their chance. The village had one large gate to the south, that which opened on the Almella road, and was in a direct line with the centre street. Two men had usually charge of this gate, who could be easily overpowered. It would be impossible to make a rush through it so long as the village cattle were coming home; but, after that, there would be no obstacle, and it was with secret satisfaction that the scouts watched the old man and Zóra, dressed in the Fakeers' garb, leave their lodging alone, and wander about the streets, singing their appeals for alms, receiving such as they were given, and so passing on. At first they had walked through

side streets, Zóra always leading her grandfather, and warning him of stones and other obstacles; and at last they emerged into the broad way, not far from the gate, where there was a space without houses, which appeared to Zóra very lonely and desolate, and there were no persons moving about as in other parts of the village.

"I do not like this, Abba," said Zóra; "it is so lonely, and you would not let me bring Ahmed with us. Let us turn back towards our home. The wallet is already heavy with meal and rice."

"Why fear, child?" returned the old man, gaily. "Who ever molests the Fakeer?"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when about twenty men, some of them carrying a small litter, emerged from behind a wall which concealed a narrow lane, and came running towards them, crying out, "Clear the way for the bride!" Zóra thought they were part of a village marriage procession, especially as there were two torches lighted; and drew her grandfather aside to let the people pass; but almost before she could think, she found herself seized, a gag thrust into her mouth, and her grandfather prostrated by a severe blow from a staff. She was then swathed in a saree and lifted into the litter, the bearers of which hurried on at their utmost speed. No noise had been heard of the slight scuffle; no alarm was given. The two door-keepers were in the act of shutting to the ponderous gates, which required

their utmost strength, and were taken completely unawares. One of them tried in vain to stop the foremost of the robbers, and was pierced by a spear before he could cry out; the other, who attempted to gain the bastion, was struck down on the first step, and there died. Then the whole gang extinguished their torches, rushed on down the main road till they came to a side path which turned more to the east, among the tall fields of jowaree, pursuing their way in utter silence for the most part, only interrupted by occasional whispers among the gang.

Poor Zóra was utterly helpless. The gag which had been stuffed into her mouth nearly choked her; the cloth by which she had been swathed up to her throat prevented her moving her hands. She remembered when the slaves of Osman Beg took her up at Juldroog they had done it gently, and she could at least breathe freely and scream for help; but this attack on her had been more savage, more determined—was this also her enemy's contrivance? She could not but think so; and his emissaries must have followed her even from Kukeyra. Whither were they taking her? She could see nothing, for the cover of the litter was of black coarse blankets, and was tightly fastened down. Without, too, the night was dark, and a drizzling rain had set in. She felt stupefied by her position, and her thoughts could take no coherent form whatever. For several hours the gang pursued their first rapid pace, not halting to relieve each other under the pole of the

litter, but one displacing another, as necessary. The men were not professional bearers, with their regular step; but persons unaccustomed to carry loads, and, in consequence, the poor girl was sorely shaken and bruised against the sides of the narrow crib. She could breathe, but that was all; and any chance of making herself heard was impossible. At last they stopped and set down the litter. Zóra could hear the gentle rushing of water, and supposed the gang had halted to drink, as one of them, slightly opening the side of the litter, felt about until he found her face, and, to her infinite relief, drew the gag out of her mouth. To her surprise the man was civil, and said in good Canarese,—

"You will be thirsty, lady, and here is water; drink. But if you attempt to call out, I cannot answer for your life; you must die. Do you understand?"

"Where am I?" she asked, faintly; "and what have you done with my grandfather?"

"Make yourself easy about him," said the voice; "he is safe where you left him. Ask me no questions, for I cannot answer you; and you will know the rest in time. No harm will come to you, and we dare not injure a hair of your head; but you must save yourself by being perfectly passive. If you cried out so as to cause alarm, my brothers would spear you, and leave you as you are."

Zóra drank eagerly of the water, and felt refreshed and

strengthened. The gag was not renewed, and with her teeth she contrived to bite a small hole in the blanket covering. She saw the gang at a short distance sitting together, and their hookah passing round among them. It was too dark to distinguish individual figures, but the sound of the gurgle of the hookah, and its bright light when drawn, showed her their position, and occasionally flashed upon the water which flowed by. Again the man who had before spoken said, "Wait till daylight, and I will bring you some roasted corn. The grain is full and sweet now. You are likely to get little else for two or three days, and if you are quiet you may be let out for a few minutes."

Zóra could not reply. With the drink of water her senses had revived, and the agony of her position became more and more clearly realised. She did not lose her presence of mind; but the impossibility of escaping from so many active and unencumbered men was not to be thought of for a moment. All she could do was to commend herself to the merciful Alla, who alone could effect her deliverance. Strange to say, she had still hope, which her faith served to increase; and if she sobbed and wept almost unceasingly, there yet seemed to be something whispering at her heart, "Fear not, for I, the Lord, am with thee!"

Presently the men took up the litter and moved on, but more slowly than before. They were unaccustomed to carry such a burthen, and already some were complaining of chafed shoulders.

Would they put her down and disperse? Then daylight broke; but the rain did not cease, and the fields of corn and cotton, through which they held their way, grew muddy and soft, and the men could proceed with difficulty.

"We must seek for some shelter," said a voice, which appeared to have authority among the gang. "We are now on the lands of Kohutnoor, and we may find a shepherd's hut somewhere; and two of you run to Hippurgah and see if some of our people will come, for we must go on again at nightfall."

After this speech Zóra found her litter put down, and the opening of the covering was untied; then she was taken out, and carried into a rude field hut and laid on the ground, but the bandages were not loosened. There we must leave her for the present, and relate what had befallen her grandfather.

CHAPTER XIII.

DELIVERANCE.

AS we have already stated, there was no alarm at the gate of the village when the Syud was struck down. Of the two watchmen, one was dead, the other senseless from loss of blood. Ahmed and old Mamoolla were, however, now anxious about their master and Zóra, and Ahmed went to the village Chaoree to ask if they had passed that way. "Yes," said the watchmen on duty for the night; "we heard them singing a long time ago, and supposed they had gone home, as the singing ceased all at once; but we will come and look—some one has doubtless asked them to remain." But they could not be found or heard of, and all were in much fear and perplexity. Could Zóra have stepped incautiously into a well, and drawn her grandfather after her? But no, there were only two wells in the village, and though lights were lowered into them nothing was seen. At last a cry was heard near the gate, and then someone, who had wished to go out to his field, gave the alarm that murder had been done; and Ahmed and the rest ran with lighted torches, saw the two bodies of the watchers, and looking about, found the old Syud, lying where they supposed he

had fallen, near the wall. At first, as blood had issued from his head, they all thought he had died, and they took him up reverently and carried him to his lodgings, where they discovered signs of life; still he had no perception of anything, and was not able to speak. The barber, who had been summoned, said the wound was slight, but that the blow had caused insensibility, and fomentation must be continued.

So the night passed, and the whole of the village was disquieted and alarmed. The idea of so holy a person as Luteef Shah Wallee, the new saint, being killed in the place, and his granddaughter carried off, was almost beyond belief. Several parties of the villagers, accompanied by the Gulburgah escort, went out to search in the fields, but returned. What could be done in the darkness and rain among the tall heavy crops? They must wait till morning; and in the morning consciousness came to the old man, though it seemed to those around him that it would have been more merciful if he had died. Who could console him? Who could satisfy him about Zóra? Who had taken her, and why? Not for her ornaments, for she had put on only those she usually wore, of small value, all the rest were packed up. When the day dawned some light was thrown on the affair by the tracks of a number of men in the corn-fields, and by broken stems of the corn, and they continued as far as the boundary of the next village, through which they evidently went; but it was no concern of the watchmen of that

village to trace the thieves unless they were well rewarded; and who was to pay them?

Meanwhile the old man raved, and called on Zóra without intermission. At times he even became frantic, and with difficulty could be restrained from attempting to proceed on foot. "Take me to Zóra! Take me to the child! Take me to Almella! Lay me at the feet of Chand Beebee, she will give me justice for my child. Oh, Abbas Khan! she watched by thy side; go to her, save her, and give her into my arms. Am I not Luteef Shah Wallee now? and my blessing or my curse are at least powerful. Yea, I will bless thee!"

"It is no use keeping him here," said the barber; "his case is beyond my skill. They have a surgeon and a doctor with the soldiers at Almella, take him thither;" and the litter was soon made ready, and the sad procession departed. It was nearly evening when it reached Almella, where it was met by a crowd of people who had heard of the outrage; and a comfortable lodging had been prepared, where the old man was reverently deposited. He was now calmer, but grief lay heavy on him, very heavy; and what could console him? When he could think coherently, he accused himself of neglect of his vows; he accused himself of incautiousness; and if she returned not, he prayed for death, Here, whence the Lord had taken him in his prosperity to

blindness and poverty, would be the fitting place for him to die. Towards evening he became calmer, and asked if any of the people of Almella were present, and the Patell, and the Putwari, and the Moolla of the mosque came to him.

"Are any of ye old?" he asked; "as old as I am?"

"No!" replied the Moolla; "but my grandfather, who is very old, can be sent for."

"Ay, that will be Sheykh Oomur, perhaps; yes, send for him." They wondered why the name should be remembered, but sent for him. When he arrived, the Syud, taking his hand, said, "If thou art Sheyhk Oomur, thou wilt not have forgotten Syud Ahmed Ali,"

"Syud Ahmed Ali, the physician!" cried the Moolla, peering into the other's face, for he was nearly blind himself. "Yes, it is he! it is he! Oh, master! I, thy pupil, have not forgotten; and to see thee here, and in this sore plight. Ah! it is the Lord's will."

"Tell them all—all," cried the old Syud, with fresh vigour, "that I am here once more. God, the Highest, hath brought me to recover my child and my honour. Go! arouse all to bring Zóra back to me or I shall die."

"It is the Syud, surely," said many old people who looked on the aged features with compassion, and well remembered them; and the authorities of the little town and of the detachment of soldiers sent out parties in search, one of which found the track,

many hours old, as they knew from the state of the broken herbage and corn, and returned unsuccessful. And the old Syud, becoming hopeless in his grief, though relieved of much of his pain by the doctor who had been summoned, was, they thought, going to turn his face to the wall and die. But still he had not asked for the prayers for the dying to be recited, and was constantly crying out, "He will not take her to shame or death; he will restore her to me. Zóra! Zóra! come soon, else I die; and I have told thee nothing." Once he said to the Moolla and others who sat nigh him, "Oh, friends, if I die, bury me here; but take my child to the Court, lay her at the feet of Queen Chand, and say I, Luteef Shah Wallee, sent her for justice." Then, as if he had no more to say, he turned on his side and appeared to sleep.

Just as day was breaking he sat up suddenly, but with vigour, and putting his hands to his ear, said, in a strong voice, "I hear a Beydur's horn; I hear the Beydurs' drums; and they bring me my Zóra! Oh, my child, come quickly, lest I die of joy! At first those who heard him—the kind doctor, Ahmed, old Mamoolla, and others—thought what he had said was part of his delirium; but Ahmed rushed out, ran to the top of the house, and looking southwards, saw the blaze of torches and about fifty dusky forms approaching at a rapid pace, while the creaking of the gate of the town showed that it was being opened. As the procession approached nearer, the sonorous drums of the Beydurs beat a joyful

march, their horns blew a victorious blast; and Ahmed ran down again to the apartment, and cried out, "It is true! it is true! Rejoice!" and fled forth to meet the lost girl, weeping like a child. And onwards came the body of men encircling a good palanquin, and the town musicians had mingled with the Beydurs, and the din and clamour were deafening. Then, as they put down the litter at the steps of the house, Zóra stepped from it, and standing erect on the highest, cried out, "The Lord bless ye all, friends, for I am safe. By your aid ye have saved me from dishonour and from death." But she could hardly speak, and her cheeks were wet with tears, which glistened in the torchlight. In an instant more she had crossed the little courtyard, reached her grandfather's bed, and exclaiming, "Abba! Abba! God has saved me, and brought me to you again when I had no hope left!" But the old man could not speak coherently; indeed, the revulsion from a dim hope to a blessed reality had almost cost him his life.

They sat together the whole day, Zóra scarcely stirring from his side, and only urged by pressing hunger to leave him at all; for Mamoolla had said, "Poor dove, they only fed it with green corn and milk, and that was not food fitted for her; and the best I can cook shall be hers and the master's, who, after all, has only a broken head; but then he is not a wrestler or a sword-player." Zóra's story was not a long one. When she was put into the hut with only two men to guard her, the rest of the gang

dispersed into the corn-fields to hide themselves, as the husbandmen would soon be abroad. Now the hut was nearer to Kokutnoor than Hippurgah, and a shepherd boy who had been watching sheep all night had seen the procession, and saw where something, he could not tell what, had been deposited. Over night a large body of Beydurs, on their road from the King's camp by Sholapoor to their homes, had put up at Kokutnoor; and the lad, well knowing their habits, went to the leader and told him that Dacoits had halted in the fields and hidden their booty in a sólitary hut. "They are Káikarees and Jutts," said the lad, "and the brother of Kulloo Naik, who was killed at Kukeyra, is their leader."

The Beydur chief who was in command of the party was soon aroused, and among his men were some of Runga's and some of Burma Naik's people; and it was at once determined that the Dacoits should be surprised and their booty captured. So, through the cover of the tall grain fields, they were guided by the lad until they came close to the hut. The two men who guarded it were speared without mercy, and, said Zóra, "I expected no less than death, when several of the men who had served at Juldroog found me, bound as I was, and were distraught with joy. They took me into the air, unbound me, and chafed my arms and my legs. They carried me into Kokutnoor; then bearers were sent for from Hippurgah, and I was fed, and had milk to drink, and I am quite well, and it is like a new birth to see your dear face once more."

What could he reply? What more could Zóra say? And so they sat without speaking much till the day waned, and the fatehas they had ordered were ready, when Zóra arose to distribute the money offerings to the poor, and the alms that had been in the wallet were part of her liberal donation.

The next day, the Beydurs having remained as their guests, and enjoyed a great feast, all those that belonged to Runga and Burma's divisions declared they would attend the Syud to Beejapoor. Runga would never forgive them if they did not; and there was no hŭrry about moving, as the King was yet detained north of the river. In the evenings, then, as the old Syud sat in the porch of the house, under pretence of begging, for he was weak still, and could not walk, the Beydurs came and told him tales of the war, and how Abbas Khan, Runga Naik, and his men had carried by storm the great battery of Ahmednugger guns, and Runga had been made a noble on the spot, while the blood was yet wet upon his sword. Poor Zóra! how her heart swelled at the narration, and how hope was revived, which for a time had appeared dead.

When the time came they moved from Almella, and reached Allapoor the day before the King was to enter the city. Thousands were passing on horseback, thousands were going to meet friends long absent, and no one noticed the blind old man and a girl, dressed in pilgrims' clothes, who, as they entered the

gate of the great city, kneeled down, and gave thanks to God. The old Syud's face beamed with gratitude and joy. As to Zóra, the splendour of what she saw almost overpowered her; but she led her grandfather forward in the direction of the citadel, and on a piece of close green sward, near the open road by which the King would pass, they spread their sheet, and began at intervals to sing the best of their holy chants; and passers-by threw alms to them liberally and freely, begging the old man's blessing. Gradually the booming sound of the King's kettledrums, and the huge pair which were carried by the standard elephant, were heard, and the old man remembered them, and said to Zóra, "They are near now; let Ahmed keep the sheet, dear, and you will see the King." Not long afterwards the people on the towers of the gates, the bastions, and in every available place they could get to, began to shout and wave scarves; and every house within sight hung out costly shawls, cloth of gold, and rich garments out of windows and over the parapets of their houses, till the city was like a garden of tulips. Following the procession were hundreds of war elephants, dressed in their richest caparisons, their bells jangling with a strange clamour, and the music of the nobat playing a march of victory.

These, however, were of little interest in comparison with the King's own circle, which occupied nearly the centre of the procession, and having entered the gate, advanced more slowly. In

the midst rode the young King, wearing, like the Queen, a tunic of dazzling white cloth of gold, and a morion with a crown of flashing jewels. He was smiling, as he greeted the people with constant waves of his hand, while his beautiful horse caracoled beneath him. Near him rode Abbas Khan, and other officers of rank; and Zóra could see Runga Naik in his new uniform of cloth of gold. The horses pranced and curvetted, tossing their heads and neighing; and the King, drawing rein for a moment, pointed out the Syud and Zóra, asking apparently who they were, when Abbas Khan, who now saw them also, dashed up to the King, and said, "It is Syud Ahmed Ali, of whom I spoke." At the same moment the old man, who had been standing, rushed forward over the sheet, and with a loud cry of "Daad! Daad!" tottered and fell on his face, nearly across the Royal path.

"Bring him on with you, Abbas," cried the King; and the young man turned at once to his old friend, throwing a glance at Zóra, which rested on flashing eyes bedewed with tears of joy, and cheeks burning with excitement, as he cried to her, "Zóra! is it thus we meet? Fear not now, for all will be well!"

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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